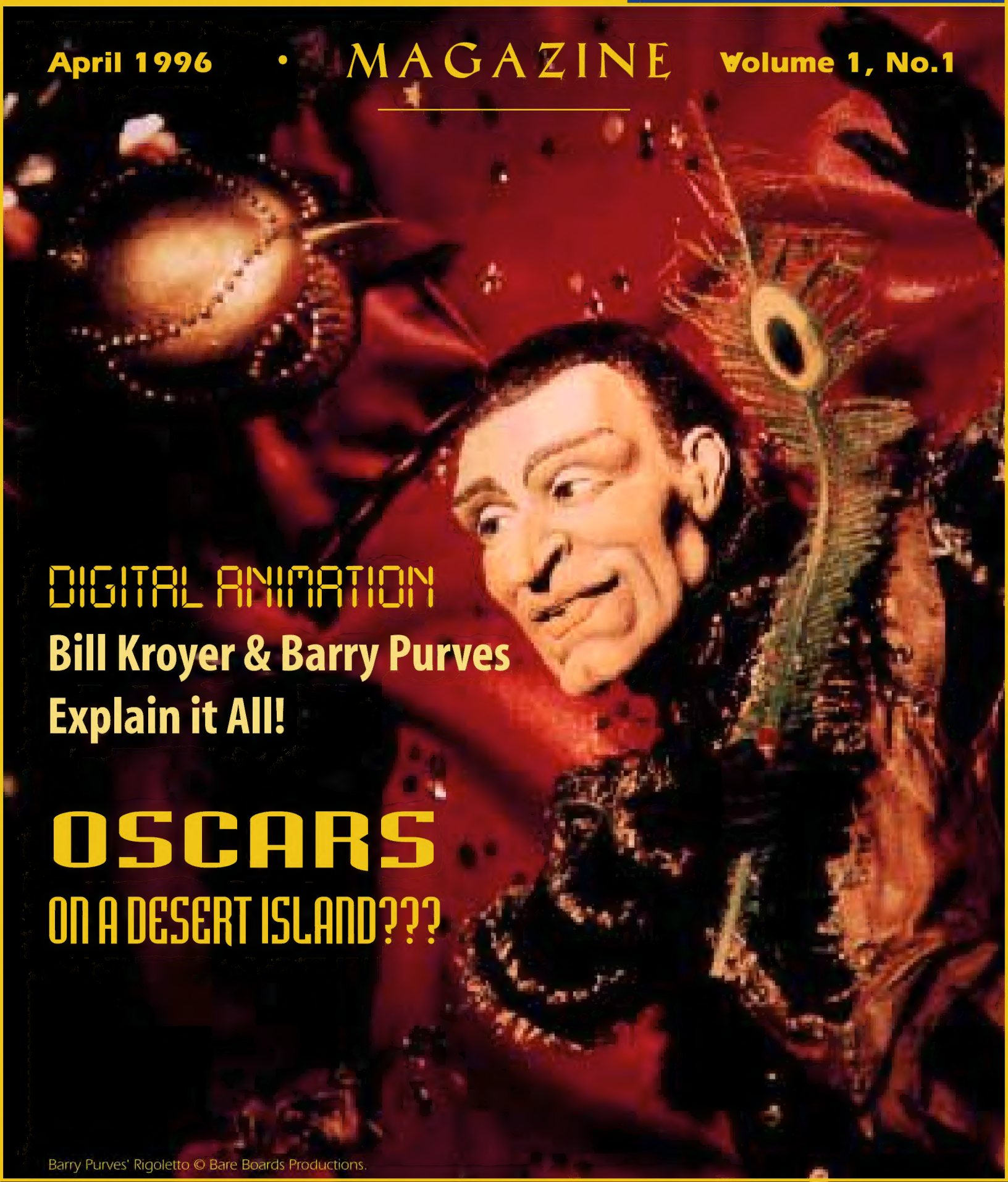
ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE

April 1996 • Volume 1, No.1



DIGITAL ANIMATION

Bill Kroyer & Barry Purves Explain it All!

OSCARS

ON A DESERT ISLAND???

Barry Purves' Rigoletto © Bare Boards Productions.

ANIMATION WORLD NETWORK
6525 Sunset Blvd.,
Garden Suite 10
Hollywood, CA 90028
Phone : 213.468.2554
Fax : 213.464.5914
Email : info@awn.com

ANIMATION WORLD · MAGAZINE ·

ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE
editor@awn.com

PUBLISHER
Ron Diamond, *President*
Dan Sarto, *Chief Operating Officer*

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Harvey Deneroff

ASSOCIATE EDITOR/PUBLICITY
Frankie Kowalski

CONTRIBUTORS :
Giannalberto Bendazzi
Olivier Cotte
John H. Dilworth
Iain Harvey
Kenneth Hutman
Mark Langer
Eric La Brecque
Bill Kroyer
Barry Purves
Nicole Salomon

Le WEBMASTER
Guillaume Calop

DESIGN/LAYOUT :
IMP Graphic
e-mail : imp_ecmp@club-internet.fr

ADVERTISING SALES
North America : Wendy Jackson
Europe : Vincent Ferri
Asia : Bruce Teitelbaum

Table of Contents

Editor's Notebook *by Harvey Deneroff* 3

Creating the Memories *by Bill Kroyer* 5
One of Hollywood's leading directors and computer animation pioneer provides a personal history of computers in animation from the days of Tron to the present. In so doing, Kroyer discusses the problems and opportunities posed by the marriage of art and technology.

The Emperor's New Clothes *by Barry Purves* 10
After ace puppet animator Barry Purves was displaced on Tim Burton's Mars Attacks ! by the folks at Industrial Light & Magic, we asked him to write something about his experience in Hollywood. The result is not what we expected, and instead he provides a wondrous soliloquy on the nature of animation, both of the traditional and computer kind.

3-D Animation in France *by Olivier Cotte* 15
Olivier Cotte, creator of Terra Incognita, provides a rundown on what's going on in 3-D computer animation in France.

Fantôme : The First 10 Years *by Harvey Deneroff* 18
A talk with Georges Lacroix, co-founder of Fantôme Animation, about his company and the popular Insektors TV series, which is a reminder that there is life for computer animated shows beyond ReBoot.

Technician of Suspended Disbelief : Rick Dyer, Shadoan and the Frontier of Animated CD Entertainment *by Eric La Brecque* 21
In the early 1980s, Rick Dyer engineered an interactive revolution when he married feature quality animation to video games with titles such as Dragon's Lair. He is still, at this time with Shadoan and talks to Eric LeBrecque about it.

Europe-A Storyboard Success *by Iain Harvey* 25
Europe has traditionally been an also ran vis-à-vis the American film and TV industries. When it comes to animation, they also have to deal with Japan as well. For the past five years, the European Union has been trying to fight back with CARTOON. A report from the trenches by CARTOON V.P. Iain Harvey.

Sinomation : Shanghai Animation Studio-Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow 28
by Kenneth Hutman
With many studios in East Asia eagerly trying to adopt to unfamiliar methods and styles in seeking work from Western producers, Shanghai Animation Studio, one of China's oldest, has a different idea.

Shamus Culhane *by Mark Langer* 30
Shamus Culhane's career spanned nearly the whole history of animation. Mark Langer pays tribute to Culhane as both as a man and as an artist.

25 Years Already ! *by Nicole Salomon* **33** (English) **35** (français)
The French resort town of Annecy is home of the premiere international animation festival ; but it also boasts of a no less illustrious animation workshop. Nicole Salomon recalls her experiences with the workshop, which has just celebrated its 25th anniversary.

René Laloux. Drawings That Move *By Giannalberto Bendazzi.* 37
René Laloux, best known for directing such animated sci-fi classics as Fantastic Planet, has now come out with a history of animation. Giannalberto Bendazzi reports.

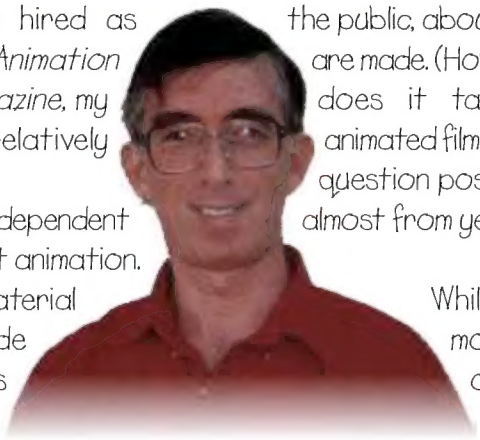
On a Desert Island With... *compiled by Frankie Kowalski* 39
Our peripatetic associate editor has asked the Oscar nominees for Best Animated Short Subject about their experiences and what films they would want to take with them if stranded on a desert island. The first of a series.

And the Envelope Please... *by John H. Dilworth* 41
A space aged look at the whole Oscar experience from nominee John Dilworth's point of view.

News 42

Next Issue's Highlights 43

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



When I was hired as Editor of *Animation World Magazine*, my assignment was relatively simple : Produce a literate, independent on-line journal about animation. It was to include material of interest to a wide variety of readers from around the world, including professionals, aficionados and those whose concerns about animation may be more "casual," but nevertheless serious. Among other things, it was to be a magazine which allowed people in animation, especially animation artists, a venue in which they could express themselves and communicate with one another. It was an assignment I gladly accepted.

Animation World Magazine is a new venture in more ways than one. Attempting to publish a magazine on the Internet is in itself something of an adventure. As such, we expect our magazine evolve and grow as time goes on. In the meantime, we are having a lot of fun doing it and hope that you will enjoy it as well.

For most of its history, animation has been considered a marginal part of the film and television industries, whose product was mostly suitable only for children. It has also been a labor-intensive craft, that has always evoked a wondrous sense of curiosity, by both journalists and the public, about how cartoons are made. (How many drawings does it take to make a animated film has been a stock question posed to animators almost from year one.)

While animation has moved aggressively over the last few years out of its ghetto-like existence and squarely into the mainstream, the public's (and the industry's) curiosity with animation technology and technique remains more intense than ever. It is also something that vitally concerns filmmakers and producers alike, who now have to come to terms with the consequences and opportunities presented by the digital revolution. These issues which are addressed rather strongly by Bill Kroyer and Barry Purves, filmmakers of distinctly different pedigrees, but remarkably similar concerns.

Despite the impression that may have been left by *Toy Story*, high quality 3-D computer animation is being done all around the world. Thus, we asked computer animator Olivier Cotte to provide an introductory survey of what's going on in France, one of the leaders in digital animation, while Georges Lacroix elucidates on in an interview I did about the delightful French TV series, *Insektors*, which is also done in 3-D.

Our digital roundup also includes an interview by Eric La Brecque with Rick Dyer, one of the real pioneers of interactive animation who talks about his newest CD-ROM, *Shadoan*.

A more general survey of what's happening in Europe is provided by producer Iain Harvey, who shows the role played by the European Union's CARTOON initiative. More focused on one particular studio, is Kenneth Huttman's story of how one Chinese studio is trying to keep its traditions alive, while at the same time trying to deal with the needs of Western producers.

A tribute to the late Shamus Culhane by Mark Langer, Giannalberto Bendazzi's look at a new history of animation by filmmaker René Laloux, and Nicole Salomon's commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Annecy Animation Workshop rounds up our first issue, along with the first of Frankie Kowalski's first roundup of animators' "Desert Island" favorites (this time, focusing on Oscar-nominated filmmakers).

Finally, I would like to personally thank Ron Diamond and Dan Sarto, who were crazy enough to hire me as Editor. Not so crazy (although she may not agree) is my Associate Editor, Frankie Kowalski, whose enthusiasm and talent have kept both me and the magazine right on target.

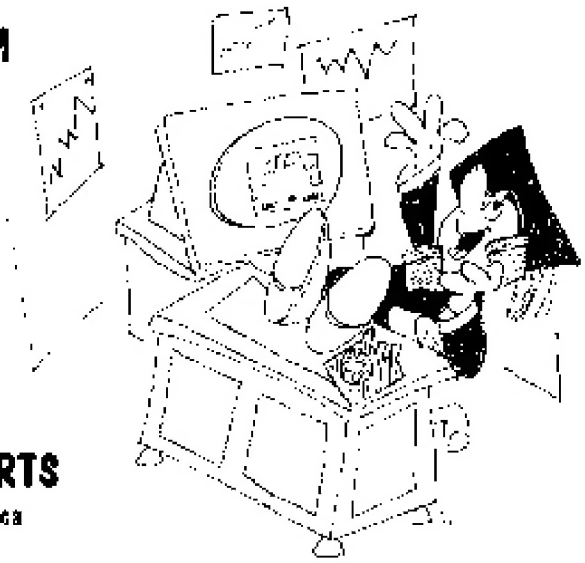
Harvey Deneroff
Editor-in-Chief
Animation World Magazine

CLASSICAL ANIMATION TRAINING

ONE YEAR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM
Classes Start September 3rd

Summer Animation Camp
Starts July 8th & August 5th

Placement Opportunities
(Close ties with major studios)



Call 1-800-396-ARTS or (604) 734-ARTS
Web: http://www.vanarts.bc.ca E-mail: vanarts@portal.ca

VanArts
Vancouver Institute of Media Arts
203-1894 W. Broadway
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6J 1Y9

APRIL ACTION FROM

漫画 MANGA VIDEO

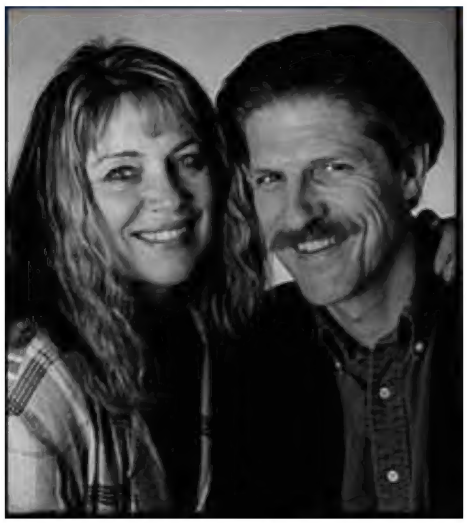
COMING SOON!
GHOST IN THE SHELL

http://www.manga.com/manga

Creating the Memories

by Bill Kroyer

This article is adapted from the keynote address Bill Kroyer gave at the Ojai Animation Conference, in Ojai, California, on July 22, 1995. The Conference, designed as a retreat for the animation industry, was sponsored by the International Animated Film Society, ASIFA-Hollywood, in association with the Ojai Film Society. When Kroyer gave the talk, he had recently started working as co-director on Warner Bros. Feature Animation's first film, now entitled The Quest for Camelot, *which is being co-produced by his wife, Sue Kroyer.*



Bill and Sue Kroyer

Today, animation is exploding. And with billion dollar animated films, direct-to-video and CD-ROMs, there are big profits to be made. That's OK, after all, it is an art-industry. People forget the hyphen, but you need money to do this art form.

What I would like to discuss, though, is not so much the business of animation, but what it means to be an artist and animation as an art form. I'm going do this from my own perspective, looking back on my career and what I've experienced.

Back in the 1960s, it was said that President Nixon was asked why he didn't think there was a recession. He said, "Well I have a job, and all my friends are working." Well, I'm happy to say that, all my friends are working now. It wasn't always like that ; but now they are and that's part of what's great about the animation industry today.

If you asked them why they were not innovating, they'd say, "Because we do what we do best," which meant they just didn't dare touch the formula that Walt had left behind.

I came out to L.A. in 1975 and immediately went to Disney to get a job. They wouldn't take me, because I didn't have an art school portfolio. Instead, I got a job in a small commercial studio, where my first assignment was erasing the stretch lines off of Mr. Clean's pants, because he looked too virile. My second assignment was to put pants on elves, because they only had shirts on and somebody finally realized they were naked. That is when I learned the two most important principles of animation : It will go by so fast that you'll never see it ; and if you can't make it good, make it loud and fast.

I Really Feel Sorry For You Kid...

I finally ended up at Disney in 1977, which was an interesting place to be then. It was the link to the Golden Age. You are probably hearing about how we are going into the second Golden Age, which I think might be true. Yet, in those days everybody sat around and moped, feeling bad about the fact that they missed it.

We used to have guest artists come over who would say, "I really feel sorry for you kid, you missed the Golden Age. Your life is worthless. Why bother ? You weren't there !"

Some of the Nine Old Men were still there in 1977, including Frank Thomas, Ollie Johnson, Willie Reitherman and Eric Larson. But the studio was still stuck in a time warp, technically and creatively. If you asked them why they were not innovating, they'd say, "Because we do what we do best," which meant they just didn't dare touch the formula that Walt had left behind.

If you were an artist who had been transported from Disney in 1941 to 1977, there wouldn't be a whole heck of a lot of technology that you would not instantly know about. You knew about peg bars, reinforcements, pencil tests and the multiplane camera. You might discover Xerox machines and reel-to-reel pencil test machines ; but beyond that nothing had really changed.

In the 1970s, the industry was in a real slump. Disney was the only studio making realistic features, and even their films had reached bottom. Then some milestones came up and things started to change.

And Along Came Tron

Many people see *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* as the big milestone. That's the one that made the money. Yes, but there was another that may have been even more prophetic : *Tron*, made by Disney back in 1982.

David Warner as the villainous Sark in *Tron* © 1982 Walt Disney Productions

Every guy in the United States of America that was into computer graphics showed up to work on it. It was like the Crusades.

I had left Disney earlier because I didn't want to work on *The Black Cauldron*. I happened to land in the lap of Steve Lisberger, who was making *Animalympics*. Mind you, this was not the world's greatest film, although it was a feature film that was completely hand ink-and-painted by nine people in a warehouse in Venice, which is pretty amazing. After *Animalympics*, we developed *Tron* and took it to Disney.

Tron became a revolutionary thing. When we first starting working on it, we didn't know how we would do it. It was just an idea about a guy and a computer. But when we showed up at Disney, something started happening ; it was almost like putting a blue light on the back porch and having flies from all over the neighborhood come to it. Every guy in the United States of America that was into computer graphics showed up to work on it. It was like the Crusades. Suddenly, I realized we were seeing this little tiny tip of an iceberg of what had been going on for years.

Tron was the beginning. It was the moment when computer graphics made its first contact with the animation industry — like the sperm and the egg.

It was neat, because nobody had ever done it before. There were no experts around. So, I inherited the position of Director of Animation. Luckily, I caught on to it pretty well.

It is incredible when you look at the people who worked on *Tron*, who are now key players at places like Pixar, Rhythm & Hues, PDI and Digital Domain. All these young guys couldn't believe somebody was really going to hire them to do this type of work.

Jeff Bridges is an electronic warrior in *Tron*. © 1982 Walt Disney Productions

Inner-Penetrating Objects and Fractal Walls

It was great. If we wanted to do an effect, we'd tell these guys, "Invent it." They had no software for it, so they would sit down and write it.

Then they would say, "We wrote some software that does this. So, we would make up something in the story to use it. For instance, they were so ashamed when they showed us inner-penetrating objects. But we thought that was pretty cool and we actually made up a neat character composed of inner-penetrating objects.

On the other hand, I once gave an assignment to do a scene where a ship flies out of a hanger. After waiting eight weeks, I asked, "Where's the scene ?" They said, "Oh man, you're going to be so thrilled. We built a fractal wall." I asked, "What's a fractal wall ?"

The idea is to do things that are cheap and look good, not things that are expensive which nobody notices. That's a cardinal rule of filmmaking.

Well, it was this thing that looked like a rock wall, the kind of thing a background painter could have done in about six hours. They worked eight weeks on it and only they would know it's a fractal wall.

That's a problem you always have. The idea is to do things that are cheap and look good, not things that are expensive which nobody notices. To me, that's a cardinal rule of filmmaking.

Tron was an unusual picture. It's where all this technology came

together and started to be utilized. Looking back now, it was somewhat primitive, but it was weird mix of human effort and technology.

If you watch the credits, you'll see a couple hundred Chinese characters at the end : those are the names of the artists who painted mattes in Taiwan. A year later, that was totally obsolete. Computers could do all that. That's how fast it changed.

The movie had story problems and was not a big hit. In itself, ***Tron*** did not revolutionize the animation industry, but it did give encouragement to the computer industry.

Building a computer generated solar sailer in *Tron*..
© 1982 Walt Disney Productions

After ***Tron***, I looked around and still didn't see anything great happening in animation. So, I chose to stay in computers and worked at Robert Abel and Digital Productions.

Computers and Crayons

I remember we had the only Cray supercomputer not dedicated to defense interests, which was used for the absolutely illogical purpose of making films. Actually, it wasn't totally illogical, because creating graphics was important. (We got the Cray because John Whitney's father, who had done the very first computer animated films using a World War II bombsight, was known in the defense industry.)

The Cray was a cool computer, able to do six billion computations a second. It was engineered to such a high level of performance, that it was actually designed to crash three or four times a day. And the only people who could start it back up again were people from Cray. So, when you bought a Cray, they sent people who would live with it, called Crayons, in a trailer in the parking lot.

The Cray was so fast that none of us could actually "speak" to it. We first had to speak to VAX computers, which then built up enough information until they felt worthy to approach the Cray. They would then shoot it over to the Cray, which would then compute it.

The Cray was engineered to such a high level of performance, that it was actually designed to crash three or four times a day.

At the time, we started doing the first hierarchical animation of figures. This means that when you move an elbow, everything underneath it, like the wrist and fingers, will follow. It sounds trivial now, yet back then people were just starting write this type of software.

The first time I animated a human figure using this software, I did a dancing cycle. Some people looked at it and said, "Wow, how did you do that ?" But one of the programmers said, "That's just key frame software." They usually think that way. They hate to think that it takes a skill that can't be canned.

Then came ***Roger Rabbit***, which made big money and showed that animated cartoons could appeal to adults and things started to change. Technology played an important part in that film and allowed animation to be sophisticated and hip again, and business started booming.

Technological Threat

My wife Sue and I started Kroyer Films in 1986 to combine computer and hand animation. Although I enjoyed working with computers, I always missed

Bill Kroyer's *Technological Threat*
© Kroyer Films

drawing and the illusion of cartoons. I wanted to create something that would allow the computer to blend easily with the pencil, which I still believe is the animator's greatest tool, as it gives one the most freedom to create an illusion.

There was this heavy philosophical depth to the movie, which the French really appreciated. No one here did.

We put together a software package that allowed a computer to draw out on punched animation paper using a plotter. It was unbelievably fast. Artists used to look at it and you could see them staring into the abyss of their own careers disappearing.

The truth is that computer people like to think that and artists often fear that. So we made *Technological Threat*, which was about just that. It showed organic cartoon characters being threatened by computer animated characters. We did the former by hand and the latter, of course, with computers. There was this heavy philosophical depth to the movie, which the French really appreciated. No one here did.

Technological Threat spoke to the question of : What is this technological revolution doing to the artist and to art ? Well, animation as we know it, is both gaining and loosing, but it's losing less than it's gaining.

The Servant-Master Relationship

Which brings me to what I call servant-master relationship, which is my obsession about how the industry should work. That is, the master is the vision and the servant is the technology.

There has been this battle ever since I've seen these two working together in *Tron*. It's natural, because much of the work we do is technology based ; it's also natural that the toolmakers believe that they are the best ones to use them, but it doesn't work that way. You go to hear Rubinstein play, not the guy who made the piano.

It's one of those things you have to be sensitive about, because you have to appreciate the skill of the person who knows how to use the technology. But there has to be a level of judgment about their ability to use it with artistic vision.

The computer world is a Cartesian world which exists in an XYZ place, which seeks to create an artificial three-dimensional environment. It tries to reproduce real dimensionality, physical space and shape.

That's valid. Yet, in my opinion, much of the magic of our art comes from illusion. That's what makes people's heads get connected. What goes on the screen may make no logical sense, but it conveys very clear emotional feelings which can be really funny, poignant and beautiful. As a matter of fact, the less sense it makes and the more emotional it gets is one way to judge how great it is.

Probably the most famous thing in animation is Mickey Mouse's ears. You can't do Mickey's ears in 3-D. You look at those outfits at Disneyland and they're not right. Mickey's ears are supposed to crawl around, that's why they are cool. It's the art of the cheat, which is essential to the greatness of animation.

Rotoscoping and live-action reference, for instance, are OK as reference. But it's not OK if it starts taking away the animators' initial vision of how to play a scene. An animator starts with a blank piece paper on which he can create anything, including somebody with both eyes one side of his head — which is perfectly OK.

Live-action reference has very limited uses. The same goes for motion capture, which is essentially the same thing.

I prefer motion to be stylized, because the essential part of the art is movement. You've heard the saying that great animation is not drawings that move, but movement that is drawn. What you are doing is creating drawings that, when looked at individually, may look bad or illogical. But when looked at all at once, they are magical. That's our art form. That's what we do that nobody else can.

So, if you're going to work in computer animation, stylize it ; bring exaggeration and caricature to it. If you do that, then you are taking it to a place that nobody else can. How many artists get to do that ?

Learning to Cope

Technology leads artists to cope in many different ways. One is by learning how to use the tools. But it's interesting how other things happen. I'll give you a brief example from a project we worked on and how our traditional animation staff had to deal with a new medium.

When the story people started working on gags, we discovered was that in video games gags (as we think of them) are almost meaningless.

We did a video game called ***Pitfall : The Myan Adventure*** for Activision. They wanted regular, Disney-style, cartoony animation. None of our staff, though, had ever done that in a video game and, in the process, found out some interesting things.

Bill Kroyer's *FernGully :The Last Rainforest*
© FAI

Usually, before starting to animate, animators want to know : What's the story ? What are the gags ? What's the point ? Who are the characters ? We started to get into that and developed Pitfall Harry's personality and his walk. Yet, when the story people started working on gags, we discovered was that in video games gags (as we think of them) are almost meaningless. The only thing valuable to the game is game play — the thing the player makes Harry do and how he reacts. That's what sells the game. It's the coolness of how he leaps, or jumps, or kills, or fights or dies. That's what they consider what we used to call a gag.

In animation, one of the first things you learn is to anticipate and follow through. But, in a video game you can't anticipate. The player doesn't want to wait around — when he wants to get a punch, he want to get a punch.

We had to figure out how to make the motion work quickly, without some of the traditional things we usually used, like power and force.

We also had to do something called linking, where every bit of animation had to link in and out of all the other animation. It's kind of weird. An animator usually gets a scene and thinks he can work with from the start, but this had a strange extra layer of restrictions on it.

Another thing we did for is that we scanned all the drawings into a computer, building up a library of 1,300 individual drawings. So, we could literally build our scripts out of those drawings in any order we wanted. We may have only done 120 intentionally animated motions, but you could build others by grabbing and stealing different things.

There were a lot of other things that make it really easy. Your color models are all digital, so you don't have to sit there and mix paint. You can pick from a million colors and instantly change them, which is really great. And you don't have to send things out to camera.
When we did ***FernGully :The Last Rainforest***, which we ink-and-painted using traditional methods, we used 4 tons of paint and produced 16Ω tons of finished art just to make one film. Now it's on a few tapes or disks.

Just a Glorified Pencil

With all these cool tools and tricks coming along, the tendency is to get mesmerized by them. That started to happen on ***Tron***. People would get caught up in a really cool tool and they think that, like the fractal wall, it would be interesting, in itself, to the audience. The audience couldn't care less about that. You have to remember that. The truth is that technology is still just a glorified pencil, something to make a vision with.

My basic approach is not to compromise these two worlds, but to compliment them. Don't lower your artistic vision by having a tool user supply the vision. Don't minimize the technical wonder of the vision by having an artist who can't work the tool as well. We need to be aware of the technology. Learn about it, evaluate it, find out what you can do with it, how it relates to you, and make good choices as how you will be involved with it as an artist. And, of course, we need to communicate to the audience.

A few years ago, Sue and I went to the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, in Northern California, where I spoke at a conference on scientific visualization. While we were there, we saw a lab where they were working on memory.

They had a device called a tape silo. It had hundreds of tapes on a rack with a computerized arm ; when you asked for a certain piece of data, the computer would know which tape had it, the arm would then take it out and find it.

They had just put on-line some new optical storage disks, which took up much less room, but were were also working on a couple of devices they hoped would expand memory even more, something visualization needs lot of.

Their job is to expand memory. Our job to create the memories. That's what we do in our business.

Remember, the vision is the master. Keep it in mind as we grow as an industry and let's hope we can all say for years to come that all of our friends are working.

The Emperor's New Clothes

by Barry J. C. Purves

I know I must be alone in this, and I know that there is nothing I can do about it except eventually accept it and go with it, but I do feel that I am waving at a computer-generated Emperor and politely telling him that he is wearing no clothes. Sadly, I feel I am deafened by the surrounding crowd saying how lovely the Emperor's clothes are, and how his wardrobe will never be the same again. I am sure it won't, but I still remain to be convinced that his wardrobe will be better.

I have a basic psychological problem with computer-generated animation, in that as soon as I am aware of any involvement of computers, a huge barrier comes between me and the screen. I can sit there and be wonderfully impressed and dazzled by the technology, but I cannot get beyond that. However spectacular the images and effects are, there is something nagging away in my mind that says, "Oh, it's computers." and I dismiss it.

I realize this does an enormous disservice to the skill and artistry behind the images, and says more about my own naiveté, my stubborn technical illiteracy and fear of things I do not understand, but the more complex the "magic" becomes, the less magical it feels. I just accept these effects without seeing any wonder in them.

If I sit in a theater, and I am presented with the illusion of a magician sawing his assistant in half, and placing the two halves at either end of the stage, that impresses me. I know it is only a trick, but with the performers physically in front of me, and with the limitations of the stage itself, I know the boundaries of what is possible, yet they have appeared to go beyond these. I have been happily tricked.

Barry Purves
© Bare Boards Productions

But if the same illusion happens on a piece of film, I am not impressed as I subconsciously know it has all been done with clever editing, or computers have erased any tell-tale part of the image that would have given the game away, or it could have been filmed over a period longer than suggested, and various body doubles replaced.

However spectacular the images and effects are, there is something nagging away in my mind that says, "Oh, it's computers." and I dismiss it.

Reversing the situation, if an animator was to animate a complex dance sequence with huge leaps and jumps, it does not impress as much as its live-action equivalent when you know the physical limitations and gravity the dance has to overcome, but which an animator is not troubled with and can ignore.

I am no longer impressed by Stallone, on film, hanging from an edge of a mountain, when I know that computers have erased thick steel hawsers supporting him, and the sheer drop does not exist and has been generated by a computer. The so-called reality of film is somewhat less than real.

One of the Great Fallacies

That the camera never lies has proved to be one of the great fallacies of the twentieth century. It now seems that the camera nearly always lies and certainly cannot be trusted anymore, and sadly, I feel that I can no longer believe anything I see. This is totally disorienting.

Knowing that publicity photos are nearly always retouched, can I believe that a certain model really has such blue eyes, or that her waist is really so ludicrously small ? Should I meet this model, how disappointed I would be in her dull grey eyes and spreading waistline.

Knowing that politicians can be diplomatically removed from incriminating photographs at the press of a few buttons, what can we trust ?

I think what basically worries me is that computer technology and image manipulation has now removed the boundaries of what is possible, and when anything is possible, I am no longer thrilled

and excited. Knowing there are no limits, my brain is dulled and no longer surprised, let alone involved. I personally am far more in awe of what George Méliés achieved a hundred years ago, with his enormous technical restrictions than some of the special effects laden epics of today.

This is probably my loss, as computers are now such a major and inevitable part of film production, and everyone says that they are just a tool for the artist. But I can't help feeling that it leads to unimaginative shortcuts and a certain sloppiness. Location managers no longer have to find the absolutely right location when the modern railroad ruining their pastoral landscape can be removed in postproduction. So what if there were not the clouds in the sky that the director would have liked — press a button and there they are. This may, of course, make more financial sense than having a crew wait around for the right clouds, but some directors could have improvised with the clouds they had and come up with something better than expected.

Pushing the Limits

But having said all that, of all the recent films that have used computer animation, the one that impressed me the most is ***Babe***. It pushes what could almost be possible to its limits, but does not go beyond. The mouth movements of the animals are so understated, and so well married to the live-action, that you do not question that they are talking. If the computer animators had given them more exaggerated Disneyesque expressions, it would not have fitted the live-action element, and the whole film would have fallen to pieces.

What is unique to Toy Story, and where the computer technology scores over any other methods, is its freedom of camera movement and camera angles, but again this is all motivated by the story.

I have to say that I feel ***Babe*** is an absolute masterpiece ; a film that is led by its story and characters, and where the effects serve the film and are almost invisible. Of ***Jumanji***, I do not feel the same admiration at all. The basic story seems flawed and incidental to me ; I cannot actually work out just how the game is played or what the game element is. But supposedly that does not matter, just sit back and enjoy the special effects.

Babe
© 1995 Universal City Studios, Inc.

Again, I feel the animals that work the best in the live-action settings are the ones that do not push the credibility over the edge. The expressions of the monkeys are absurd and lose credibility very quickly ; the charging rhinos, however, are all too credible, with some wonderfully detailed and quirky movement as they crash into each other.

Of ***Toy Story***, I am in total awe, as it is such a well told story, its gags so perfectly timed, and its characters so rich and true. That it is all computer generated is almost incidental. The film is so well directed and seamlessly constructed that it could work in any medium. There are a few awkward moments with the humans who still look less credible than the toys, but that is nitpicking.

What is unique to ***Toy Story***, and where the computer technology scores over any other methods, is its freedom of camera movement and camera angles, but again this is all motivated by the story. Too many films are showing off the technology's capabilities, without necessarily finding a justification for them — the incessant morphing of the headgear in ***Stargate*** comes immediately to mind.

Bridging the Gap

As part of that extinct race of dinosaurs known as model animators (and how ironic that a dinosaur is really making us extinct !), it is fascinating to actually study computer animation. Traditional cel animation and model animation have their own qualities, and now computers are somewhere in between, bridging the gap.

Drawn characters are full of stretch and squash, and their elastic anatomy works in their own stylized world. Against the drawn backgrounds, it is easy to accept a character rushing away with its legs taking a beating to catch up. Model characters work less well when they try this, unless, like Nick Park's wonderful characters, they are heavily styl-

ized to begin with. The convention set by their accentuated mouth shapes carries through to their bodies, but even with Wallace and Gromit they could only stretch so far. A 10 ton weight that flattens a drawn character cannot flatten a model character without this convention being clearly established.

Model characters have a stronger psychological reality, because we can see that they do exist physically, especially when they relate to their environment, and we expect them to react within certain physical boundaries. When they cross these boundaries, the effect is naturally humorous.

I have tried, with my own work, which cannot really be described as humorous, to see how far I can push what is credible with puppets. It clearly depends on how stylized the puppets are, and how stylized their environment is. With my film *Next*, I initially thought of the film as interpreting each of Shakespeare's plays as a series of wild gags, often involving Shakespeare detaching a limb or his own head to be used as a prop, and then miraculously appearing complete in the next scene. This may have worked with a drawn, or even a caricatured claymation Shakespeare, but as soon as our puppet was designed, I realized that his detail and "realism" would not allow for this.

Barry Purves' Next
© Bare Boards Productions

Model characters have a stronger psychological reality, because we can see that they do exist physically, especially when they relate to their environment, and we expect them to react within certain physical boundaries.

Such humor as there is in the film comes from the character doing realistic things in an environment that appears to be realistic but proves to be very elastic. Just where do all those props come from, and how does he appear to be leaving the stage and coming on the other side at the same time ? What he does looks almost possible — if I had made his actions totally impossible, the film would have been a very different, less elegant film.

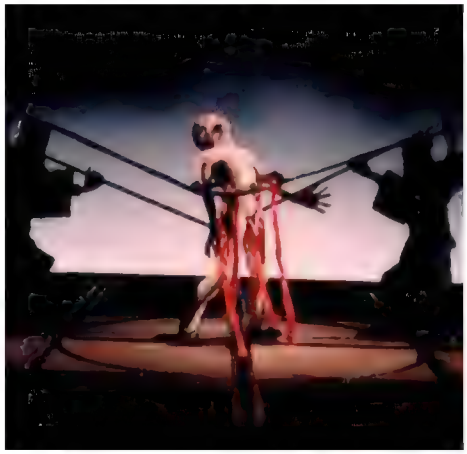
With *Screen Play* and *Achilles*, I laid my cards on the table, and said that this film is all going to happen within this confined area, but out of these boundaries will conjure up the illusion of different images. It's the "before your very eyes" thing again. It is this slight of hand that interests me, but I cannot see a way of combining it with computers.

Computer characters have some of the characteristics of both drawn and model animation (as shown in *The Mask*), but I still have the feeling that, again, anything is possible, and that they don't actually exist in any tangible form ; and this for me, destroys their credibility. I certainly did not, for one second, believe in the CGI creature in *Species*, and so failed to be scared by it. The men-in-suits creature at the beginning of the film was far more credible and scary, but it clearly was there in the same space as the actors.

Nine Months on Mars Attacks !

I have just spent nine months in Hollywood working as Animation Director on the Warner Bros.' *Mars Attacks!* This has been an incredible education into the workings of a feature film, but a very disturbing experience to see how things are led by money and studio politics. The contents of the film itself, seems such a small priority. I was also surprised at how terrified anyone was of that word "Culture," but that's another story.

The live-action film, *Mars Attacks!*, is a *War of the Worlds* story, with Martians invading America. Anything to do with Martians and their flying saucers was originally intended to be stop frame puppets, with the whole film conceived as a homage to Ray Harryhausen and those wonderful, simple monster movies of the 50s and 60s.



Barry Purves' Screen Play
© Bare Boards Productions 1992

In a flash the whole model animation team, puppets, sets and facilities were dispensed, to be replaced, eventually, by computer generated Martians.

The Martians were to be seen both in heavy spacesuits reacting with live-action characters on Earth, and in a near naked state in their own totally animated environment, in their spaceships. The animation tests of the naked Martians were looking good and suitably creepy. We had spent months working on bizarre little Martian gestures and ways of moving. The suited Martians were less convincing as we were working in something of a vacuum, with no live-action action to play against, but this would have come with more rehearsal. We were animating puppets in an empty space, with takes lasting up to 20 seconds, when probably, in the film the same Martians would only have been glimpsed in a quickly edited sequence with a whole load of other business going on. Little wonder that the puppets crumbled under such cruel exposure.

However, the film ran into serious script problems which sent the whole production months behind schedule and over boarding, and with the live-action having to be shot after most of the animation. In a flash the whole model animation team, puppets, sets and facilities were dispensed, to be replaced, eventually, by computer generated Martians.

Trying to Be Objective

Trying to be objective about what effect this will have on the film, I do think it was a mistaken decision. The feeling of the film will now be very different, and any idea of an homage has to be lost. The suited Martians on Earth will, I agree, probably look more convincingly related to their environment, but I shall be interested to see how, perhaps, a limb will have slightly stretch, in order to match a live-action actor's movements.

The computer work will allow for a lot of fitting in with the live-action, and for last minute decisions to be made (decisions that really should have been made in preproduction), and the whole thing will look very slick. I shall be interested, too, to see if they resist throwing in every trick in the book, just because those tricks can be done.

Model animation, by its very process, has a slight unpredictability and spontaneous feel to it and this does give it a unique edge.

Of the scenes inside the saucers, with the naked Martians, this is where I am most concerned that the computers will fail. All these scenes depended on the acting abilities of the animators. Here the Martians really had to be convincing and have their own body language and peculiar little gestures, unlike anything we have seen. This is where I think the team of animators I had assembled for the film would have excelled. We ignored animators' reels where everything was all flashy images, and instead concentrated on reels where characters were acting.

There is no doubt, after *Toy Story* and any of John Lasseter's films, that computer characters can act (mainly because John's staff are actors/animators first, and technicians second), but I do feel that the sustained closeups needed for these scenes would have been perfect for model animation.

A Unique Edge

Model animation, by its very process, has a slight unpredictability and spontaneous feel to it — even the animators cannot exactly predict where the puppet will go — and this does give it a unique edge. With drawn and computer animation you can feel the character moving from plotted key position to key position. Puppet animation evolves in a unique way, and this certainly would have helped the Martians.

Because of the one-to-one relationship between an animator and puppet in the actual process of animation, a lot of the character and the passion of the animator himself goes straight into the puppet and its performance. It is the most purely personal and honest form of animation (often revealing surprising aspects of the animator's personality), and acting is the most undiluted, whereas with drawn and computer animation, it is, to some extent, animation by committee. There are, of necessity, so many more people involved, and something really does get lost on the way.

I also get the feeling that computer characters have to keep moving — certainly on the evidence so far, perhaps, a held closeup would reveal too much. Puppets do not need to be remodeled each frame, and can take long unsustained shots.

There is no doubt that computer characters do have some enormous advantages over puppets — they

do not have to be secured to the floor ; they do not have to be suspended on wires when they jump ; wearing of clothes or a long cloak do not get in the way of the animation process ; a move can be erased in the animator is less than happy (and an animator knowing he can always do something again makes him, unconsciously, work at less than a hundred percent, like an actor at a dress rehearsal) ; and so on ; but there is still something missing. I still do not believe they are there. I do not feel I could reach out and touch them. The slickness and sophistication of computers somehow removes the characters from reality, and in my mind, destroys their credibility and thus my involvement in their story.

Comparing the new ***James and the Giant Peach*** (though I have only seen a rough cut) and ***Toy Story***, I really did so warm to the former's characters — it is easy for me to believe in them and their world, because I can almost touch them. The ***Toy Story*** characters, however brilliantly animated and designed, are still distanced, for me, by the slickness and feel of computers.

Energy and Spontaneity

Up until about six years ago, I would always animate without any form of video recording playback or a monitor for reference, and I probably feel that I did my best animation under those conditions. My concentration was more focused, and I made sure that I was certain of every movement, or believed in every gesture, before I animated it, and I would do a shot in a complete session without breaking and losing attention.

Now, with sophisticated equipment, I have the chance to look at a movement and wonder whether it is too large or too small, and analyze it endlessly and immediately all manner of doubt and choices are planted in my head, and the original spirit and instinct can be lost. I can break a shot and go for a break, play back the tape, and carry on, but the impetus is lost.

Wherever possible, I strive to make each take the equivalent of a live performance, and hope that some of that energy and spontaneity comes across. Computers, sadly, come across as too rehearsed, controlled and rather cold.

Working on a test on ***Mars Attacks!***, marrying animation into a live-action scene, all the technology involved made me feel I was trying to recite a speech from ***Hamlet*** whilst someone was shouting telephone numbers directly into my face. It was hard work, impossible to concentrate, and probably the performance suffered.

I did find, on the film, everyone had an absolute consuming compassion for the new technology ; and too often it made things so unnecessarily complicated, with the original intentions getting lost in the process.

In my own work, I am striving to get back to what animation is about — the acting of the characters. ***Achilles*** was an attempt to make a film where I could concentrate on the acting, unhindered by any technology.

There probably always will be a small band of model animators around, but we will now be regarded with quaint curiosity — in the same way that people look at writers who still write with pens. Today, it seems, the method of writing is of more interest than the words that are actually written.

Barry Purves' *Achilles*
© Bare Boards Productions 1995

***Barry Purves** is a Manchester-based filmmaker who is now developing a feature based on Benjamin Britten's opera,* Noye's Fludde, *for his company, Bare Boards Productions.*

3-D animation in France

by Olivier Cotte

***Dino Island*, produced by Ex Machina for Iwerks Entertainment.** © Iwerks Entertainment

It has been said that four countries have provided leadership in 3-D computer animation : the United States, Japan, Canada and France. One could expand that list to include other countries, such as England ; but in any case, France is certainly one of the leaders.

A Little Bit of History

Three-D computer animation is not new in France. Its history goes back to the 1960s and the experimental works of Peter Foldes at Service de recherche de l'ORTF, an experimental art/technology lab run by Pierre Schaeffer. (Its beginning, of course, actually dates back to the flight simulators used by the French Army, which are much the same as those that now run on personal computers.) Soon after, a firm called Sogitec emerged from this prehistoric period and eventually became the largest company of its kind in Europe, and is now known as Ex Machina.

At the time, more than 15 years ago, the computers being used were big, expensive and slow. The pictures Sogitec/Ex Machina generated were flat, ugly and expensive. Very few classically trained were interested in this new way of making films.

In the early 1980s, the French government gave a lot of money to spur the growth of this new industry and a film festival, Imagina, was set up to showcase 3-D pictures from all around the world.

Production companies, and especially post-production companies, began to buy equipment to produce 3-D pictures for TV commercials and advertising. They used, and still use today, a very complete software package called Explore, from Thomson Digital Image (a division of Thomson, a French company specializing in computer and hi-fi equipment). And when these companies could not find the right software to create the images they wanted, they wrote one themselves.

Today's Hardware and Software

As is customary elsewhere, a variety of software is used in France. A large percentage run on Silicon Graphic work stations, a platform that uses the old, but powerful Unix operating system. It is a very flexible platform, which allows each individual animator to customize his or her own setup with small, personalized programs. The amount of software that runs on UNIX is large and today even includes small applications written for personal computers. These work stations are often linked with PCs and Macintoshes, where one can prepare the "maps" (the textures you can see on the shapes of the 3-D objects). Frequently, several programs are used in making a single film : each one has its own niche, as an all-purpose software still doesn't exist.

The hardware and software used today are the same around the world. The main exception being the in-house software developed for internal use at various companies. For instance, MacGuffline has developed an excellent program to do morphing ; Duran has a program that quickly integrates several layers of imagery, while Ex Machina has one that one can handle muscle distortion ; *K.O. Kid* was made at Buff with software that creates an animation of a "3-D flat" character ; etc., etc.

Scenes from Olivier Cotte's *Terra Incognita*, a film that includes a variety of animation techniques, including CGI, as well as live action.
© Olivier Cotte

Who Works in 3-D ?

Different kind of people work in 3-D : There are those who model the shape and volume of objects (an object can be anything you want — a character, an animal, furniture, etc.), others paint textures, animate and do the lighting.

For complicated shapes (like animals), artists start by sculpting the objects with plaster. Then, the object "appears" in the computer by inputting coordinates from a series of points drawn on the shape with a special pen linked to the computer.

Companies specializing in 3-D each have their own unique styles.

Today, more and more traditionally trained animators are coming into 3-D animation. An increasing number of artists who create textures come from a traditional painting background. In other words, these two separate worlds are now becoming one. The war between the two universes (traditional/computer) is over.

Latest Techniques

There is a new way to animate, known as motion capture, which has been around for a few years. It's a kind of "rotoscoping" that involves shooting a real person in a special studio, with sensors attached to key points on the body (with some on the clothes or even the skin). The system provides a computer all a person's coordinates while he or she is moving, which can then be reproduced by the computer with great accuracy. The interesting thing, of course, is that you can change the character while keeping the movements intact ; for instance, a realistic dancer can be turned into a cartoon one, while continuing to do the same dance.

Another interesting development, in the field of virtual reality, is being done at MediaLab. Every day, in France, you can see puppets being animated in real time on the Canal + cable network. Two classical puppet animators wearing data gloves make the character act : one handles body movements, the other works on the face. Of course, this sort of technique needs a very powerful computer. More amazing, though, is that the system is used with an interactive TV game : the players, sitting at home, call in to indicate the route a pizza delivery man has to take through a city "built" just for the game, which is seen in 3-D, in real time.

MediaLab, as its name implies, is a kind of laboratory that specializes in TV production. In the field of virtual reality and real time 3-D animation, they probably have a two or three year lead over everybody else.

Another spectacular system was created by I.N.A. (Institute National de l'Audiovisuel). A background, a car, or any other solid object is photographed, with several graphic targets included on the field or the object itself. A computer then analyzes the movement with absolute accuracy and you can then change whatever you want. For instance, you can put a synthetic car in real landscape (like in a film made for Renault, the French automobile company), or you can do the exact opposite and create a 3-D landscape for a real car (used for advertising Italy's Lancia). I worked on these projects and I can assure you that the system is very impressive.

It is to France and the UK that European producers usually go to realize their projects.

So, What About the Pictures ?

Companies specializing in 3-D each have their own unique styles. If you want to generate a ride (dynamic cinema) the power of Ex Machina is the best. If you want to do special effects for 35mm theatrical films, Duran has the most experience (they just won a prize at Imagina for their work on ***La cite des enfants perdus***).

The principal markets for these companies, which include both the domestic and international markets, are : advertising films (including TV commercials) done on videotape or 35mm film ; the occasional industrial film ; special effects for feature films ; TV specials ; and films used for theme park rides and exhibitions. Several studios work on video games, with the most important company in this area being Cryo.

In Europe, France's major competitors are Great Britain, Italy, Germany and Switzerland ; other European countries have 3-D computer animation industries, but

most highly developed are in the UK or France. It is to these two countries that European producers usually come to get to realize their projects.

The Future ?

Things have changed considerably since the first experiments came out of the labs in the 1960s. We are now in the industrial age of computer animation.

It's difficult to guess what the future will be. The more advertising agencies and film producers use these techniques, the more it will generate new talent and fuel its growth. With the proliferation of personal computers, more and more independent animators are bound to explore this fascinating world. Art schools now include special courses in this area ; prestigious schools, such as the Ecole des Beaux Arts de Paris and the Ecole des Arts Decoratifs, have 3-D computer animation departments. Several general consumer magazines, including some in television, provide an increasing amount of information to the public at large. The future is already here. The doors are wide open. We just have to make it live.

Terra Incognita © Olivier Cotte

**"One evening, a merchant is visited by a strange traveler
who sells him an extraordinary parchment :
a universal chart that had the ability to transform itself during it's journeys.
"Captivated, the merchant sets out on an expedition,
into the graphic universe of ancient charts,
to discover it's country of origin."**
Olivier Cotte on *Terra Incognita.*

***Olivier Cotte** is a
Paris-based director
and computer animation artist, whose
credits include*
Terra Incognita.

Fantôme : The first 10 years

by Harvey Deneroff

Georges Lacroix and Renato of Fântome with their International Emmy Award for Insektors.
© Fântome, Ltd.

Fantôme Animation, based in Paris, has found considerable success of late with its 3-D computer animated TV series, ***Insektors***, which went on the air shortly after ***ReBoot*** started airing in the U.S. and Canada. While ABC network has canceled ***ReBoot***, ***Insektors*** continues to be shown on France's Canal + cable network and on France 3 ; it is also broadcast in 20 other countries around the world, including Japan, Korea, Australia, Great Britain and Italy. It also won an International Emmy Award in 1994, in the "Children and Young People" category — the first for a French animated show.

"Fantôme," company co-founder Georges Lacroix points out, actually consists of two companies. One is Fantôme Animation, a production house which creates projects and raises the money ; the other is Fantôme, a production facility, that also works for others on TV commercials.

"From the very first," Lacroix recalled, "we declared that Fantôme was a creative studio specializing in 3-D computer animation. We also started it with the dream of eventually making a full-length animated feature film, just like ***Toy Story.***"

At the time, such dreams seemed far away, not only for Fantôme, but for other computer animation studios around the world, who were hampered by an expensive and often limited technology. "Back then," Lacroix jokingly points out, "it was only possible to animate a few spheres and cubes. Today, the way is very open."

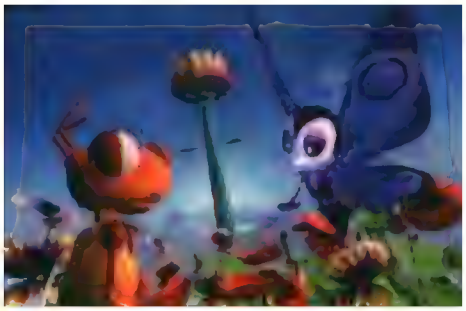
Fantôme initially concentrated on what Lacroix calls the "reality market" — special effects, commercials, corporate logos, etc. "Step-by-step, though, we started to do character animation" and started making its own films in 1987, with ***Sio Benbor,*** a parody of a Japanese movie ; this was followed by ***Sio Benbor II***, which spoofed John Lasseter's computer animation classic, ***Luxo Jr***.

...such dreams seemed far away, not only for Fantôme, but for other computer animation studios around the world, who were hampered by an expensive and often limited technology.

Geometric Fables

These led to ***Les Fables Geometriques*** (Geometric Fables), a series of 50 two minute shorts made for TV over a period of 3 years (1989-92). These shows, featuring songs and narration by Pierre Perret, were freely adapted from Jean De La Fontaine's and Aesop's Fables. Though not a full-blown show, ***Les Fables Geometriques*** lays claim to being the first 3-D computer animated TV series.

The show's geometry is reflected in the familiar characters, who are rendered in basic geometric forms of three-dimensional squares, spheres and triangles, enlivened with highly



Insektors © Fântome, Ltd.

saturated primary colors. In this, Fantôme made the best of a low budget and limited technology.

The show also served as a shakedown cruise for more ambitious projects to come. As Lacroix points out, it was a learning experience. "We were learning how to animate, to use the software and the hardware ; and most importantly, learning how to instill a sense of teamwork in our staff.

"Animation has a long history and," he notes, "we didn't want to reinvent the wheel, because a lot of companies did [conventional] animation and we didn't want to do that. But our tools were new. It was like when the saxophone was first introduced into the orchestra. When that happened, they didn't throw away the pianos, violins and the other instruments. But still, you have to know how to play the saxophone and it took us three years to learn it."

Insektors

In 1991, as production of *Les Fables Geometriques* was winding down, development began on *Insektors*, a considerably more ambitious project, which creates a lively insect world in which the forces of light and color battle with a somber monochromatic one, in the guise of the happy-go-lucky Joyces and the gloomy Yuks..

Actual production did not really start until 1993. Over the next two years, Fantôme made 26 thirteen minute episodes (essentially 13 half hour shows) and may start on another 26 episodes next year.

I asked Lacroix if there was any particular reasons they selected insects for their characters. He noted that, "Four years ago, when we started our planning, we had to anticipate the probable evolution of the technology available to us, in terms of both hardware and software. At the time, we were not able to raise enough money to do very sophisticated animation, say in the style of *Superman* or *Batman*, where you had figures with muscles and other anatomical details. Nor could we do something like a Tex Avery cartoon, because of the expense involved.

Animation has a long history and we didn't want to reinvent the wheel.

"One of the reasons we chose insects is simply because they were easier to animate. For instance, they did not require muscles and they made lip synch simpler ; it's easier just to have the mouth move like a box, without having to purse their lips to whistle or to smile and show their teeth. Those are things we can handle when we get bigger !

"Essentially, we decided not to ask to the computer to do more than it could do. Instead, we concentrated on finding some good stories. We just wanted kids to laugh and feel comfortable with those damned insects. That was and is our main goal."

Insektors cost "close to $10 million, including development costs. But," Lacroix points out, "that compares to $37 million spent on making *Toy Story* (plus $20 million for marketing). We spent about $1 million on development, while *ReBoot* spent $8 million, though their goal was to produce 26 minutes of animation a month."

"Computer animation technology," he notes, "has evolved greatly, as has the skills of our artists. Today's software is more viable, more interactive and more ergonomic. And today's computers are becoming both cheaper and more powerful.

"Perhaps," Lacroix feels, "we can call our first 10 years a developmental decade. And perhaps we can say that the next 10 years (knock wood) will be a time to tell stories and forget about the time when computers were cold, impersonal and expensive."

In asking Lacroix about what he liked about *Insektors*, he replies that, "like Woody Allen might say, if you could imagine what I had in my head, you would be very disappointed by what you see. But I am very proud of the many talented people here at Fantôme. I like, in particular, the rendering. Some of the episodes also have good animation.

A Tool to Let Us Dream

"Don't forget, we need to stay very modest, because we have to learn. We are at the very start of a huge and powerful tool that can let us dream.

Insektors © Fântome, Ltd.

"Quite modestly, we are at a point somewhat akin to where Disney was when *Steamboat Willie* came out — although *Steamboat Willie* is much better than *Insektors*. That's how I feel.

I'm proud of the people here. I'm proud of certain episodes. And I'm proud when you see a kid laughing. When that happens, we win, because they don't care if it's done by a computer. When you catch the soul of a character or background, you forget the technique."

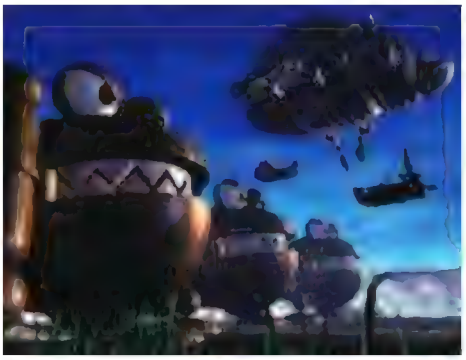
We are at the very start of a huge and powerful tool that can let us dream.

I mentioned to Lacroix that when I first saw *Insektors*, it reminded me of the pioneering efforts of the Polish-French animator Ladislas Starewicz, whose early puppet films, such as *The Cameraman's Revenge* (Russia, 1912), also featured insects.

Lacroix was flattered by the comparison, "because I love his films. But the difference between Starewicz and us is that he was much better and more realistic. After all, he was an entomologist. We have been to his home, near Paris, where you can see how passionate he was about insects.

"Frankly, although I love Starewicz and his films, he was not our original inspiration, as we took a very pragmatic approach to the world of the insect. But in a way, you are right, because in one way we feel like we're doing puppet films. And in that area Starewicz is a major figure."

Besides planning for a new season of *Insektors*, Fantôme is now working on a new series, which has the working title of *Spaceship Earth*. Lacroix classifies it as an "edutainment" series, which will consist of 260 two-minute episodes. "It's about the Earth's voyage around the sun, which will provide the viewer with a window on our solar system." They are also getting set to do an *Insektors* Christmas special. And perhaps, in the not too distant future, Fantôme's dream of making a feature will be not too far off.



Insektors © Fântome, Ltd.

Harvey Deneroff, in addition to his duties as Editor of *Animation World Magazine*, edits and publishes *The Animation Report*, an industry newsletter, which has taken over operation of the annual Ojai Animation Conference.

Technician of suspended disbelief :

Rick Dyer, Shadoan and the Frontier of Animated CD Entertainment

Interview by Eric La Brecque

Rick Dyer and the *Hologram Time Traveler* © Virtual Image Productions

Santa Monica, 6 p.m. Rick Dyer is one hour late. From somewhere on a jammed and rainy freeway the President and CEO of Santa Ysabel, Caliifornia-based Virtual Image Productions calls on his cell phone ; he's turned around. Taking a nearby exit, he describes what he passes and I confirm his location, all the way to our rendezvous. As an everyday example of the interplay of technology and improvisation, the situation is mildly amusing. But at another level, this very interplay is what Dyer is all about.

At 41, the game designer and inventor has been developing interactive video games for the CD-based and coin-operated markets for as long as just about anyone, and his successes are now legend : Among them is ***Dragon's Lair,*** the world's first full-animation video game and one of only two games on display at the Smithsonian Institute and ***Hologram Time Traveler***, the world's first holographic video game.

Dyer has come to present his latest creation, an interactive CD-ROM adventure title called ***Shadoan***. The adventure genre is by now, of course, well-canvassed territory. The quality and extent of animation ***Shadoan*** incorporates, however, is not. Slated for release this June on Sony PlayStation, Saturn, Macintosh, CD-I and PC platforms, the game has engaged a feature-sized-and-then some team of 300 animators working steadily over a 9 month period. ***Shadoan*** might just rank as a breakthrough project, which is why Dyer is betting a $2 million bank on it. The breakthrough is this : ***Shadoan*** has the richness of a high-quality animated feature. Its animation is smooth and compelling. Oh, and it boots up quickly, and occupies only two CD's worth of space.

In other words, as far as adventure games go, ***Shadoan***'s format is something new. A milestone comparable in its way, perhaps, to a ***Snow White*** ? Or, if the public doesn't catch on, nothing more than a lavish dead end ?

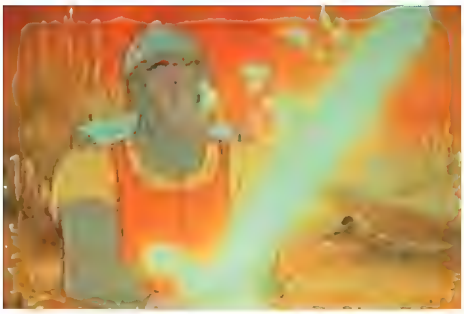
A hard-to-pinpoint something seems to animate Dyer's voice and manner. Not anxiety, despite the stakes involved. Sure, ***Shadoan*** is a big deal. But Dyer's feelings about his story seem to run to the deep and personal. He speaks tenderly of his Swords and Sorcery otherworld : What's at stake is the validation of a sizable chunk of his imagination.

That might account for pride he takes in ***Shadoan***'s many little niceties — details that impart a high level of finish.

There's the parental control option, for instance, that allows the deletion of violent scenes. And then there's Dyer's use of famous Hollywood composers Martin Erskin, Doug and Brian Besterman, and Andy Brick to create 30 completely original musical tracks including a lush theme song, "Where Do You Go From Here ?," that just might find its way to the radio — another interactive first.

The game is up and running in a matter of seconds — and this on only a standard 8 megs of RAM. Gratifying. Dyer's background in coin-op art and the crucial importance of the quick come-on haven't been wasted. A few minutes later I'm shuttling pretty comfortably between ***Shadoan***'s various locales. I challenge a group of ruffians in a tavern brawl, join a military campaign and die several deaths, some quite dramatic. Standard Swords and Sorcery fare, perhaps, but newly compelling in VIP's carefully crafted format. In all, ***Shadoan*** provides maybe 20 hours of play before the scope of its fantasy world begins to seem finite.

Shadoan, Dyer informs me, was 17 years in the making.



Dragon's Lair, the pioneering game that featured animation by Don Bluth.
© Readysoft

So you were trying to make this game, and the technology didn't exist ?

That's why it's taken this long, yes. Only very recently have we acquired not only the technology but a big enough base of consumers to justify producing something like this. Up until then, I was fighting an uphill battle, trying to create a technology that wasn't there. We were trying to create the hardware as well as the software to make it happen.

It was during this period, wasn't it, that you introduced *Dragon's Lair* ?

As a matter of fact, *Dragon's Lair* came out of *Shadoan*. It was a spin-off. We never imagined, in our wildest dreams, that it was going to be the popular hit that it was. Up until 8 months ago, *Dragon's Lair* was up in the top 10 selling titles in the world. And it's a 13-year-old game.

But in terms of *Shadoan*, what was it, 17 years ago, that compelled you to tell this story, to take on this project, in the first place ?

It came from two things. First, back in the early Seventies there was this computer game called *Adventure*. It used a kind of pseudo-artificial intelligence, and it was cool. (It evolved into what came to be known as *Zork*..) At the same time, I read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and said, "Wow ! Can you imagine creating an interactive world like *Lord of the Rings* ?"

So, let's just imagine the interactive rights to Tolkien were up for grabs and somebody said to you, "Here they are. They're yours." Think of it, the classic story ! What would you do ? Set aside *Shadoan* ?

No. *The Lord of the Rings* is an old story. It came out, what, 20 years ago. What we're creating now is just as rich — and it's fresh and new.

So is Shadoan a *story* ? Or rather, is it a set of experiences. I mean, does the storyline exist only as a set-up for the game ?

One of the things that's unique about what we do is that we're developing the story on two levels. One is what I call *the novel* — it's a linear version of the narrative. The other is what I call *game design*. Two separate groups work on these two versions of the story. This month, the novel that's the sequel to *Shadoan, Journey Into the Primal Abyss*, will be published. It's been in development for two years now, and it's a can't-put-it-down, riveting story unto itself. At the same time, the game design is underway. The two groups communicate with each other very closely, but in the end they work independently because the goal is to have both a great novel and a great game.

Once that process is finished, we weave them together like a tapestry. That's when we go to the third design phase, and a rewrite of both. However, at that point the novel stands on its own. From there, it might be adapted into a feature film. Right now, however, that's not the focus. We spent years on the foundation — designing the characters, the story, the plot, the game — before we ever got into the animation. That's what makes this thing so rich. Most grown-ups say they don't play video games that much ; this one they will.

Shadoan is a family product. Family in the true sense of the word *family*. Not just something the parents go out to buy for their kids, not just something that's parent-approved, but something the parents enjoy playing as much as the kids.

Is that an assumption, or do you have some kind of market research to back you up ?

Yes, that's based on focus groups. What you'll see in virtually every case is Mom and Dad and the kids all playing at the same time. They're playing by consensus. You'll hear things like, "Should we go over here ?" "No, they warned us about this and this and this — so what do *you* think ?" A social process is taking place as they move through the adventure.

A novelty ? The *title du jour* ?

I believe *Shadoan* has a shot at the immortality factor, much like *Dragon's Lair*. Ten years from now the game interface or game design might be considered primitive, but until we reinvent television the animation is as good as it can get, the music is as good as it can get, the entertainment value and the content are as good as they can get. The same was true with *Dragon's Lair*. We started with hand-drawn cel animation, and you can't get any better than that.

Hand-drawn cel animation over computer animation ?

The best, the absolute best, example of computer animation that's being done today is *Toy Story*. It cost a fortune — a lot more than traditional cel animation. They pulled out all the stops, and yet it still can't measure up to the kinds of expressions and feelings that can be transmitted to the viewer through hand-drawn animation. You're talking about a medium that is 60 or 70 years old.

It comes down to this : At this point in time, computer animation has its forte and 2-D animation has *its* forte. Two-D is not going to go away. Don't think that for a second. It has survived the test of time. Three-D will not replace 2-D ; it will simply augment animation as a new form.

If I remember correctly, you do in fact use some 3-D animation in *Shadoan* as well.

We used 3-D animation for what it's best at : a virtual environment. The rest of *Shadoan* is done from a third-person perspective, but when you enter Daelon the Wizard's chambers, which is a 3-D environment, you switch to a first-person perspective and you're looking at a scene where there are no other characters. Showing characters is where 3-D animation comes up short. It's hard to create lifelike figures that move in a realistic, believable manner — unless you're going to go into "dummy dolls." But when you take 3-D animation and put it into a first-person perspective and create a fly-through environment — well, that is where it shines.

So what we're doing is using both mediums for their respective strengths.

Is there any way to characterize the resulting experience you've created ?

It's probably the first version of an interactive movie that *works*.. I know, "interactive movie" is a buzz word — no one knows what it means because no one has ever done it right. There have been lots of attempts at an interactive movie.

The World of Kingdom from *Shadoan*
© Virtual Image Productions

I agree, no one knows what it means. But not everyone would say *Shadoan* defines the term, either. Take the live-action CD-ROM title *Johnny Mnemonic*, which came out last year : It's told in real time, from a first-person point of view, with very little discernible interface — a different set of criteria for *interactivity*.

Yes. Actually, the term *interactive movie* now has something of a negative connotation. And certainly there are many variations. Some would say the first was *Dragon's Lair* — it was certainly a form of interactive movie. And *Shadoan* is another. Or maybe not. It's a little bit of everything : a book, a game, an adventure, a movie — elements that have evolved over the past 20 years.

If I have one thing over other people in this industry, it's this : I've made more mistakes than anyone else. You're seeing people repeat the same mistakes we'd already made years ago. I could even show you a product that attempts to do what *Johnny Mnemonic* does. It's called *Secrets of the Lost Woods*. It was a failure. It didn't work with people.

That's the key, isn't it ? No matter how well the title works technically, it doesn't matter if people can't connect with it.

There are so many human interface considerations. Did you notice how things flowed for you ? The interface is intuitive. That's not easy to accomplish. It requires an incredible understanding of all kinds of little nuances. For you — the person experiencing this — all you know is that you had fun. You're not thinking about the nuances that make the interface as transparent to you as possible, that preserve *the suspension of disbelief*.

The Plague Magician from *Shadoan*
© Virtual Image Productions

Let's turn to the animation itself. First, you had to find some animators...

Before I started the animation, I went to eight or nine companies and showed them the game script, the design, what we wanted to do. I toured their facilities, looked at their work. The ones I liked were invited to submit a bid package. I went to some excellent houses that do outstanding work, but I found their prices extravagant.

Was it hard to find animators willing to buy in to what you were proposing ? From the companies' point of view, *Shadoan* must've represented something of an unknown. And we're talking about a really big project here. One you could lose your shirt on, if you bid it wrong.

I've essentially made my living by operating on the frontier. Because of my track record, I've been able to attract the level of talent to keep operating there. For the companies I called on, *Shadoan* represented a change from the everyday, bread-and-butter work, which mostly turns out to be advertising of some sort — a grind for them.

So, who won the assignment ?

Sports & Entertainment (based in Boulder, Colorado) is the firm we ended up using. Their work was very good and they're a $2 billion conglomerate. We liked that because we knew if they ran into cost overruns they'd be able to absorb them.

The animation style seems clean and competent but not really edgy. What were you looking for in terms of the style, the sensibility of *Shadoan* ?

Shadoan is a family game designed for all ages. To use an "edgy" style would exclude a large part of our audience and date the material.

You've said, "The animation is as good as it can get." What specifically do you mean by that ?

That it will keep its value. Most companies use computer graphics that leapfrog every 6 months in technical quality. We use cel animation, the highest level of animated film. *Snow White* is over 50 years old and is still just as good as when it was first released. Our game may not have that long a shelf life, but it will definitely outlast computer games using graphics that will be obsolete in months rather than years. And unlike most Saturday morning cartoons, it's richly detailed and the backgrounds are lush.

What lies ahead, in sequels to come ?

We are moving to a more ambitious style of animation because we need to stay ahead of the pack. The budgets for these projects are just going to rise and rise.

Are you concerned about maintaining consistency ?

The consistency is in the story, in how the characters and situations of one game are connected to the next. No one is going to complain if we take the game to a higher level.

Eric La Brecque
is a Los Angeles-based writer who specializes in design and popular culture.

Your Ad Could Be Here!

For rate cards and additional information about various opportunities for exposure at Animation World Network, contact our Los Angeles office at

213.468.2554

or e-mail any of our sales representatives:

North America:

Wendy Jackson
wendyj@awn.com

Europe:

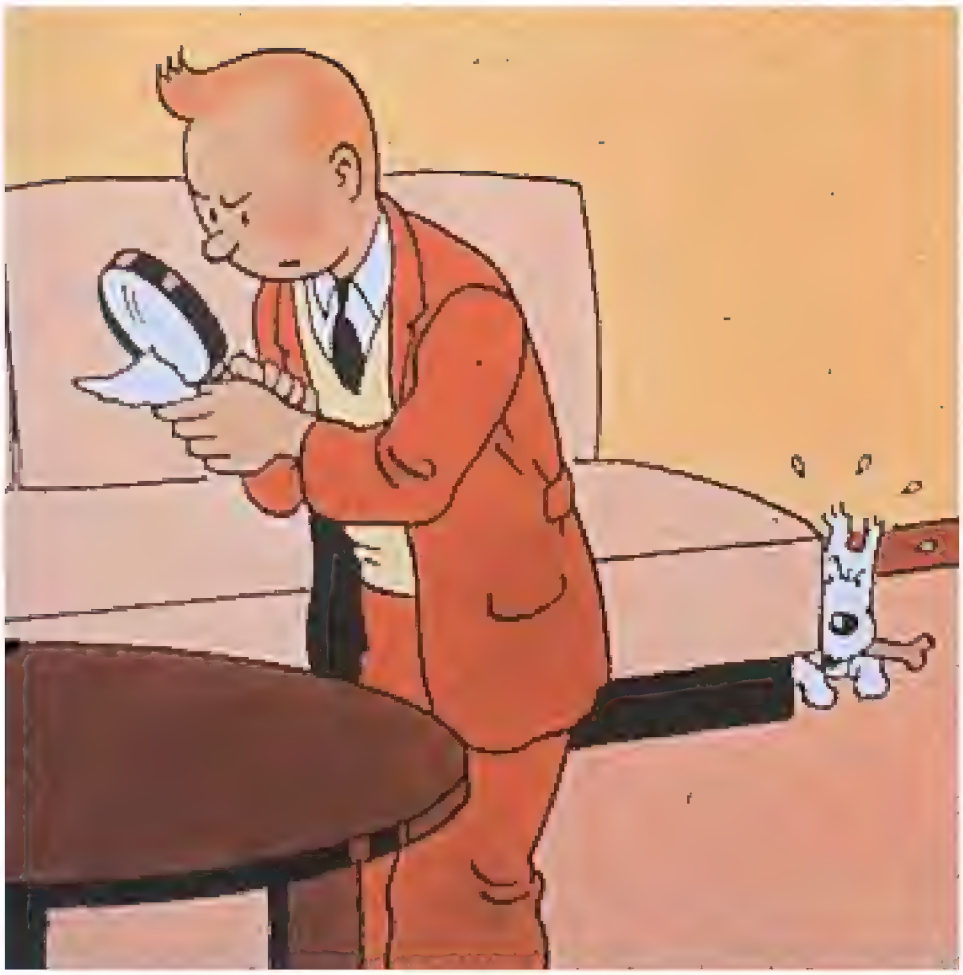
Vincent Ferri
vincent@awn.com

Asia:

Bruce Teitelbaum
bruce@awn.com

Europe – A storyboard success

by Iain Harvey



The Adventures of Tintin © Nelvana Ltd

European animation is on the move — though whether the confidence of producers and studios is fully justified remains to be seen. Iain Harvey, an independent producer who has worked with such studios as TV Cartoons, Hibbert Ralph and Animation City, as well as his own production company, The Illuminated Film Company, discusses the progress of European animation over the last decade. Though his article is written from a European perspective, Harvey believes that, "European animation producers still have a great deal to learn from American producers. The American emphasis on script and story telling is one element, but other factors also distinguish the differing approaches of studios on both sides of the ocean."

As Vice President of CARTOON, Iain is very aware of the limited resources within Europe, but believes that there are still grounds for hope that recent progress can and will be sustained.

Just over 12 years ago a leading British animation studio — world famous for its commercials and such feature films as *The Yellow Submarine* — had never received, in its first 25 year's existence, a single commission from British television, In the last year (1995), it had three separate premieres, two on ITV (*The Story Store*, a children's series, and *The Wind in the Willows*, a 90 minute TV movie, with a sequel scheduled for Christmas 1996), and one with the BBC (*The Further Adventures of Peter Rabbit*, part of a 9 x 30 minute series of high quality animation), as well as repeat screenings of three other of its productions : *The Snowman, Father Christmas* and *Grandpa* (all on Channel 4).

Elsewhere in Europe the growth of and interest in animation has seen dramatic increases throughout the last decade.

Total audience for these broadcasts — 20 million, in the UK alone. Total video sales, worldwide, of all these productions (not all yet released) — nearly 10 million units and still rising !

In France, there were virtually no animation studios of any substance as recently as 5-7 years ago. Now many children's animated television series broadcast in Europe are either produced or co-produced with French studios such as Praxinos (including *The Animals of Farthing Wood*, an European Broadcasting Union co-production), La Fabrique (best known for titles such as *Souri-Souri*), France Animation (*Arsene Lupin*), Ellipse Animation (*Tintin*, in co-production with Nelvana of Toronto), etc. Distributors such as Saban and Gaumont are also

prominent. French policy has also been to place great emphasis on computerized methods of production, with ***Insektors*** being the recent winner of an International Emmy Award.

Production of animation in Germany is also booming, with major studios centered in Berlin, Hamburg and elsewhere, often working in association with studios and support services in the former East Germany and other Eastern European states. With large investments from such major players as Bertlesmann, the Kirch Group and Ravensburger, German producers are well positioned to play an increasingly dominant role. Elsewhere in Europe the growth of and interest in animation has seen dramatic increases throughout the last decade. One to watch out for, though only in its very early stages of development and unlikely to be available before 1997-98, is ***Lupo Alberto***, an anarchic comedy featuring a wolf suffering from being in love with a chicken. He is a major character featured daily in Italian newspapers. Its development is a sign that, at long last, Italian broadcasters and especially RAI are beginning to take animation seriously.

Father Christmas visits Las Vegas in TV Cartoon's *Father Christmas*, its followup to *The Snowman*.
© 1991 Blooming Productions

Part of a Worldwide Boom

The development of and interest in animation across Europe is part of a worldwide boom. To date, the strong European growth has been in television (although there have been some lamentable attempts at feature films). I do not think it is too parochial to suggest that one body more responsible than most for helping animation break out of its ghetto-like existence is the UK's Channel 4, which commissioned TVC's ***The Snowman*** — the production responsible for that studio's development as a major producer for television. For those not aware of the fact, though this broadcaster is financed from advertising — and therefore has to follow a commercial policy to survive — its legal brief, on being set up, was to cater particularly for "minority" audiences.

That animation was selected as one such minority suggests clearly the status with which it was regarded. But such has been Channel 4's achievement that the BBC, over the last three years, has also targeted animation as a key area — and is now basking in the success of Nick Park's Wallace & Gromit series. These two channels, with some support from other progressive broadcasters ; such as Canal + (France) and Premier (Germany), provide showcases for new animation talent in particular. Britain is also blessed with strong support from broadcasters for children's programming (the BBC, again, and Carlton in particular, leading the field), as well as imaginative and often well financed distributors (of which HIT is probably the best known).

One body more responsible than most for helping animation break out of its ghetto-like existence is the UK's Channel 4.

For feature films, the main success stories are American, with many studios desperate to imitate the continuing achievements of Disney. The dramatic returns obtained by the high profile animated features of recent years have not been experienced by European producers, except in isolated examples. ***Werner***, a uniquely German animated feature, was a major box office hit in its own country, but failed in the rest of the world. A superficial conclusion therefore might be — as in live action — that Europeans can hold their own with animated production aimed at television, whereas the real money and dominance is retained by the major American studios in features. Unfortunately, at least from a European perspective, that conclusion is correct — for the present.

***The Little Punk*, a new film by Michael Schaak, the director of *Werner*.**
© 1996 Trikcompany Filmproduction

CARTOON and Other Factors

A number of factors might just change the picture. First, there has been a growing recognition within Europe that animation and the art of animation is very much a part of

the European heritage. A key body that has helped this fact to be realized is the European Association of Animated Film, better known as CARTOON. This body was created under the original MEDIA program, a pan-European initiative set up in 1989 to try and add financial and marketing weight to the highly divided audiovisual media industries scattered around Europe. Within MEDIA there were many separate initiatives to cover the spectrum of the film and television worlds (from script development to video distributors to documentaries, etc.), but it has generally been accepted that CARTOON, administered from Brussels by a small team, has proved one of the most successful.

For feature films, the main success stories are American, with many studios desperate to imitate the continuing achievements of Disney and have not yet been experienced by European producers.

CARTOON isolated the key points in trying to develop a substantial European animation industry : development, transnational cooperation and training, but it also highlighted the talent working within Europe with such headline grabbers as the Cartoon D'Or, the "Oscar" of European animation. The success of its policies is visibly demonstrated in such initiatives as The Cartoon Forum, an exclusive meeting of animation buyers (from television and video) and financiers with European animation producers. At the last Forum, held in Finland, there were over 500 participants — of which one third were prospective financiers. Some of the rewards of CARTOON's investment over the last 5 years are only now being realized, but if there is one fact connected with animation, it is that returns do not come fast. As Disney and other studios such as Warner Bros. and MGM discovered, once they do flow, they can, if properly managed, prove consistent and highly lucrative. Within Europe therefore, animation is now seen as financially respectable — a dramatic change of perspective still not fully realized by all producers.

This, alone, would not change the picture, especially given the extreme caution with which financiers regard the European film industry. But another factor in the increasing confidence of European animation is the brilliance of some of its originators. That this is recognized in America is evidenced by the increasingly large colony of European talent working there. Of course, there is also one name, not yet rumored to be departing from his Bristol base, that stands out — that of Nick Park, creator of Wallace & Gromit. His originality alone, though, would not be sufficient to increase one's confidence in the growing strength of European animation.

However, coupled with the wonderful inventiveness of the actual productions, involving of course a growing team of motivated creatives, as well as highly supportive commissioning editors, is the astuteness of the studio management at Aardman Animations, where he works. This has seemingly prevented over-hasty exploitation of material and helped ensure an increasingly strong build-up of demand for the output of the studio. The result is, eventually, a quicker pay-back period and, even more importantly, sufficient marketing clout to launch their

Wallace and Gromit in hot pursuit in Nick Park's *The Wrong Trousers*
© CBS/Fox Home video

new productions, a virtuous circle long desired by many studios.

Marketing power is only one of the key requirements in developing a successful feature film industry (and must also explain the tentative nature of my observations and conclusions, as the longest production Aardman has yet been responsible for is 28 minutes). No European based film player can hope, at least in the foreseeable future, to develop — or afford — the long term strategy and dominating marketing power of the major American studios, and in particular Disney. The simple fact is that Disney took many decades to build up this position of strength and though it nearly let it go in the seventies, it is understandably determined not to let this dominance slip. Such is the way of capitalism.

Equally, however, capitalism teaches us that following alternative strategies can enable initially weaker competitors to move into a position of relative strength. And this hope, is the long term strategy of a number of European based animation groups. The results will not be seen for up to another 5-7 years, but it is just possible to predict that, for once, the talk will not just be about *Toy Story III*.

© Iain Harvey 1996

Sinomation: Shanghaï Animation Studio

Yesterday, today and tomorrow

by Kenneth Hutman

Happy Numbers (Shanghai Animation Studio, 1984)

On a visit to Shanghai, China's enduring leader Deng Xiaoping offered the concept that, it doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, the important thing is that it can catch mice. No, Deng was not making a reference to Inspector Black Cat, one of the most popular cartoon characters on Chinese television. Deng's cat was meant to symbolize the birth of a new China, a China that would once again allow trade and investment, and a limited flow of ideas from the capitalist West.

Today, Shanghai is undergoing a rebirth. Back in the early 1920s, the salons, galleries and clubs of Berlin, New York and Paris found their parallels in Shanghai. The city was cosmopolitan, sophisticated — a gathering place for artists, intellectuals and business tycoons. And with its movie studios, Shanghai was also considered the Hollywood of China.

In recent years, European animation studios were the first to use the resources of the local Chinese animation industry, with the Americans lagging somewhat behind. In dealing with Western companies, though, apprehension soon turned to aversion. An economy and culture that had focused inward created obstacles for China's producers to meet the realities of dealing with overseas markets. Chairman Mao meant more than Mickey Mouse ; work was allocated, not chosen.

The city was cosmopolitan, sophisticated – a gathering place for artists, intellectuals and business tycoons. And with its movie studios, Shanghai was also considered the Hollywood of China.

For over 30 years, Chinese production was driven by a central authority and focused on producing material primarily for the domestic market. Now, in dealing with foreign producers, they were faced with production schedules based mainly on economic demands. Studios in China failed to meet deadlines and the animation did not meet Western standards.

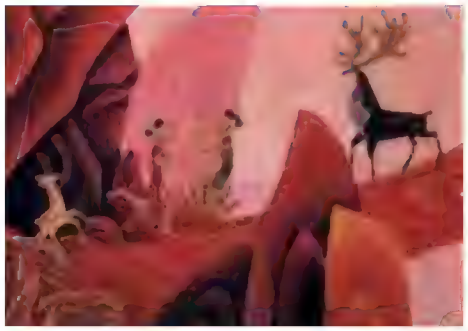
Julie Reinganum and Philip Jhin, cofounders of Prrfect Animation, experienced China hands with over 15 years of creating business on the ground in China, nevertheless saw the potential for producing animation in Shanghai.

The question remained as to how best to utilize the talent and economic advantages offered by doing animation in China, given the problems of differing artistic styles, unreliable studios and an unpredictable political environment.

Reinganum and Jhin's answer : Communication. In 1992, San Francisco-based Prrtfect Animation, entered into a cooperative relationship with Shanghai Animation Studio, China's oldest animation studio. (It dates back to 1949, before Mao Tse-tung had taken control

The Little Pig
(Shanghai Animation Studio, 1981)

The Fox and The Bear
(Shanghai Animation Studio, 1983)



The Water Deer
(Shanghai Animation Studio, 1985)

of China.) For its part, Prrfect provided the management and artistic oversight of a Western staff on the ground in Shanghai, complemented by its headquarters staff in San Francisco. By blending Western management and artistic direction with an existing Chinese studio, Perfect was gradually able to turn out animation that met the demands of Western audiences and producers, while costs remained lower than in other parts of Asia.

Given the studio's long history, Prrfect's approach differed from other turnkey strategies involving establishing a new facility and then going after talent.

The studio itself is located on a three building lot near the center of Shanghai. The buildings' architecture tells the studio's history : The main building is a two story art deco structure more suited for South Beach than Shanghai; two five story buildings, rectangular boxes using practical Communist cinder block construction; and a new building, featuring mortar, bricks and glass which is still under construction, echoing the construction boom possessing Shanghai. (A favorite rumor is that 25 % of the worlds construction cranes are located in Shanghai.)

The talent was also already there. The Studio's animators were trained in Shanghai's art schools, with the directors and key animators having graduated from the Shanghai School of Fine Arts.

A Variety of Styles and Techniques

The Shanghai Animation Studio, over the years, has turned out a considerable amount of original animation, using a variety of styles and techniques ranging from cutout to traditional cel animation. Content included Chinese folk tales, moral stories and action adventure stories. While many of the titles have a Western feel, like Inspector Black Cat, there are also titles that are particularly Chinese — what can be called Sino-mation.

The question remained as to how best to utilize the talent and economic advantages offered by China, given the problems of differing artistic styles, unreliable studios and an unpredictable political environment.

Grounded in traditional Chinese painting, where empty space is used to depict substance and the striking brush strokes to depict motion, Sino-mation also uses this minimalist approach. Another form of Sinomation is paper cutout animation. As the name indicates animation is achieved by using figures — some with movable joints — cut out of paper. Overall Sino-mation content is low on violence and is focused on didactic themes.

The Studio which was only producing for local broadcast is now busy working on projects ranging from multi-episode TV series to animation for CD-ROMs and the Internet for clients around the world.

The cat must catch mice ; the studio produces high quality animation. The outside world, like Prrfect Animation, has much to offer China in ways of efficiency, dependability and quality control.

But China, like Shanghai Animation, also has much to offer the outside world in terms of new styles, ideas and talent.

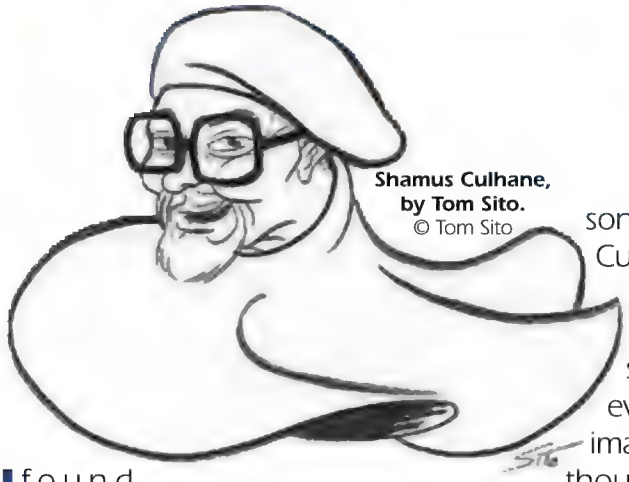
Then again maybe Deng was talking about Inspector Black Cat.

The Straw Man
(Shanghai Animation Studio, 1983)

Kenneth Hutman
is Vice President of Perfect Animation in San Francisco for the past 10 years ; he has had a wide range of international experience that blended both cultural and business activities.

Shamus Culhane

by Mark Langer



Shamus Culhane, by Tom Sito.
© Tom Sito

I found out about the death of Shamus Culhane through a voice mail message from *Animation World* Editor Harvey Deneroff asking me to write an obituary. Two years had passed since Shamus had told me that he was dying, but somehow I never took this news seriously. Despite his physical decline, his mental vitality gave him an aura of permanence. I simply couldn't imagine a day when Shamus Culhane no longer would be here. Since receiving Harvey's call, I've had an opportunity not only to assess Shamus' contribution to the field of animation, but to review his presence in my life.

I first met Shamus Culhane over twenty years ago while I was a film student in New York. Researching animation history, it occurred to me one day that I could just pick up the phone and call some of the artists who made these films. The first person I phoned was Shamus Culhane, who spoke to me for hours. In many ways a private individual, he still had time for everyone. Now, I can only imagine what he must have thought as he fielded my youthfully fervent and generally idiotic questions with grace and patience. Shortly afterwards, I organized a Fleischer retrospective at the Columbia University Cinematheque. Shamus was invited for a question and answer session along with a group of other former Fleischer employees.

Animation drawing by Culhane for Chuck Jones' *Inki and the Minah Bird* (Warner Bros., 1943)
Courtesy of Vintage Ink & Paint. © Warner Bros.

Shamus was completely relaxed, recounting his years as an animator in an ironic, and occasionally ribald, fashion. "Call me Shamus." he insisted. I thought, If this were Picasso, would I say, "...uh, Pablo ?

The evening was monopolized by the antics of an aging voice artist, who sang and danced numbers from forty year old cartoons as the animators sat in the vain hope of getting a turn to speak. While the others did a slow burn, Shamus sat, wearing a beret and smoking a cigarette, with a bemused smile on his face as if he had expected this little joke all along. And, I suppose he did.

Some years later, I went over to the Culhane home to do a formal oral history. Stiffly and awkwardly, I read out my prepared questions as if I were interviewing the Pope. Shamus was completely relaxed, recounting his years as an animator in an ironic, and occasionally ribald, fashion. "Call me Shamus." he insisted. I thought, If this were Picasso, would I say, "...uh, Pablo ?"

The turning point in my relationship with Shamus came during the terrible heat of a New York August in 1990, when he and I drank the afternoon away in a nondescript bar. As the alcohol worked its magic on me, I began to look at Shamus (from my prone position beneath the brass rail) in a wholly different light. Previously, I had seen him as an historical figure – as Shamus Culhane, animator of Pluto, the Seven Dwarfs, Woody Woodpecker, Betty Boop, Popeye, the Ajax Elves, and the Muriel Cigar.

From Punching Holes in Paper Cels

Here was a man whose experience touched every period and aspect of animation. The man who began his profession punching holes in paper cels at the Bray Studio ended his career as an advocate of computer animation. The boy who left school at the age of 16 became one of the best educated figures in our field. The man who was formed in the factory system of the animation industry argued for independent production, creative commitment and the recognition of animation as art. Born Janes Culhane in Ware, Massachussetts on 12 November 1908, Culhane moved to the Yorkville area of Manhattan as a

Gag drawing made by a co-worker at Ub Iwerks Studio when Shamus Culhane went off to Yuma, Arizona to get married.
Courtesy of Vintage Ink & Paint

child. Having resolved to be an artist at an early age, Culhane studied commercial art at the Boy's High School in Harlem. One of his schoolmates was Michael Lantz, brother of animator Walter Lantz, who was then producing cartoons at the Bray Studio, Inc. Culhane was hired by Walter Lantz in the summer of 1924, eventually working his way up through a variety of jobs as darkroom assistant, animation cameraman, and then finally as an opaquer. During lunch hours, Culhane tried his hand at animating sequences. Before he was 17, his animation had been used in a cartoon.

With the collapse of the Bray Studio, Culhane was employed as an inker on Krazy Kat cartoons for Ben Harrison and Manny Gould. When owner Charles Mintz moved the studio to the west coast, Culhane remained behind and found work at the Fleischer Studios on the "Out of the Inkwell" films as an inbetweener. The sudden departure of several senior animators left only Ted Sears, Grim Natwick and Roland "Doc" Crandall animating in the studio. Along with a group of other inbetweeners, Culhane was promoted to animator overnight. The first film by these novices, ***Swing, You Sinners***, demonstrated the experimental, nightmarish quality of the studio's output in this period. Recalling his early training at the Fleischer Studios, Culhane later told animation historian Greg Ford, "with this free-wheeling approach to mass and volume... it didn't really matter what you did with anything.... There was a much less restrictive approach than the one you'd get at Walt Disney's." Culhane became the head animator or a major contributor to several Fleischer classics, including ***The Herring Murder Case, Chess-Nuts*** and ***Betty Boop's Bamboo Isle.***

Going West

In 1932, Culhane joined a westward migration of Fleischer employees to Ub Iwerks' Celebrity Productions, where he worked on Flip the Frog, Willie Whopper and ComiColor Cartoons. This was followed by a brief stint at the Van Beuren Studio in New York. Dissatisfied with the artistic standards in these studios, Culhane accepted a dramatic pay cut and demotion to inbetweener in order to work at Walt Disney Productions. After a grueling apprenticeship with Bill Roberts and Ben Sharpsteen, and intensive study with Don Graham, Culhane was promoted to animator. His most notable work for Disney included the classic sequence with Pluto and the crab in ***Hawaiian Holiday*** and the dwarfs' "Heigh-Ho" number in ***Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs***.

While animating Honest John, Gideon and the Coachman in ***Pinocchio*** (a sequence which exhibits the attention to lifelike gesture and expression that became a hallmark of Culhane's work), he was overtaken with ill health and left Walt Disney Productions for the Fleischer studio, which had relocated from New York to Miami. There, Culhane headed a unit that animated sections of the feature

Storyboard frames from Shamus Culhane's *Fairweather Friends*
(Walter Lantz, 1946), courtesy of Mark Kausler.

57. **Wolf speaks to Woody and tells him which way they should go.**

58. **They get to their feet fast - wave good – byes**

63. **Woody holds wolf up by the tail and speaks**

64. **They both open their mouths to take a bite**

© Walter Lantz Productions

Gulliver's Travels as well as a number of shorts including *A Kick in Time* and *Popeye Meets William Tell*. Culhane remembered this period as frustrating because of the differences in philosophy between the Fleischer and Disney studios. After completing animation on the opening sequence of *Mr. Bug Goes to Town*, Culhane left for Hollywood. Following a brief stint at Warner Bros., where the animator worked on Chuck Jones' *Inki and the Minah Bird*, Culhane joined the Walter Lantz studio. There he directed several of Lantz's Swing Symphonies, including *Jungle Jive, Boogie Woogie Man* and *The Greatest Man in Siam*. Culhane was also responsible for some of the classic Woody Woodpeckers, most notably in *The Barber of Seville* and *Ski For Two*.

His animation of Honest John, Gideon and the Coachman in Pinocchio exhibits the attention to lifelike gesture and expression that became a hallmark of Culhane's work.

Shamus Culhane Productions

At the Lantz studio, Culhane began to animate instructional films for the war effort. With the end of hostilities, following a couple of abortive efforts to enter educational filmmaking and children's television programming, he established his own company, Shamus Culhane Productions. Within a short period of time, it became a major force in the creation of animated commercials, and Culhane became known as a pioneer of this new form. Among Culhane's creations were the Ajax Elves and the Muriel "Come up and smoke me sometime" Cigar. With operations on the East and West Coasts, Culhane's company moved into the animation of educational films with the *Bell Science* series, produced by Frank Capra, utilizing animation by such talents as Bill Hurtz and Bill Baird. For Culhane, Hurtz and Saul Bass devised the opening credits for the feature film *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

Shamus Culhane Productions collapsed along with virtually every other New York animation studio in the recession of 1959-60. Culhane turned to animating for other companies, most notably on the *Out of the Inkwell* and *Milton the Monster* television series' for Hal Seeger or on the film *The Hat* for John and Faith Hubley's Storyboard Productions. From 1966 to 1967, he headed Paramount's animation studio, guiding it through a period of renewed creativity that resulted in such films as *My Daddy the Astronaut* before studio bean-counters stopped animation production. Later, with Martin Grieve, Culhane created a series of educational movies for children. As the filmmaker later recalled, "This was one of the happiest experiences of my life. I had the freedom to develop stories. I was the producer, director, writer, research person and did some of the layouts. I used every sort of talent I had in the process. This was the beginning of my career as a writer."

Toward the end of his life, Culhane completed two books — an autobiography *Talking Animals and Other People* (1986) and the instructional *Animation : From Script to Screen* (1988). As a writer, lecturer and educator, Culhane hailed technical advances in the medium and became a passionate proponent of independent production and the promotion of animation as a fine art. Although plagued with ill health, Culhane continued to write and draw until his death at his home in New York.

While writing this obituary about Shamus as an historical figure, I keep thinking of my afternoon in that New York bar in 1990 when I began to know him, not for what he did, but for who he was. Shamus had a marvelous appetite for living. The purity of his pleasure in talking about ideas was infectious. Firmly convinced of the imperfectibility of humankind, he did not in the least exclude himself from that judgement. He equally was assured of the importance of art, and was unshakable in his devotion to it. He was learned and sophisticated, yet never lost his Cagneyesque touch of Yorkville.

Today, it is far easier imagining Shamus in some artists' Valhalla, drinking Johnny Walker Black with Honore Daumier and T.S. Sullivant, than it is to sum up this extraordinary life in fifteen hundred words. What I can tell you is that Shamus was a brilliant moment within our time. He knew his own mind and passionate heart and didn't give a damn if anyone disapproved. I, like many others, loved him for all of this and bid him a fond final adieu.

Mark Langer
teaches film at Carleton University in Ottawa Canada.
He is a frequent contributor to scholarly journals and a programmer of animation retrospectives.
Langer is currently working on a Culhane retrospective for the Ottawa International Animation Festival.

ENGLISH VERSION

25 Years Already !

by Nicole Salomon

This year, A.A.A. (Atelier de cinéma d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie), the pioneering ASIFA workshop, celebrates its 25th anniversary. To commemorate this, I would like to explore some of the reasons that led its organizers to what has become a quarter century effort to educate young people in the art of animation.

We live in a world of images — cartoon strips, movies, television, video games, etc. — which both fascinate and inundate children and teenagers. However, very little has been done to prepare these "consumers" to judge what they see, or to appreciate and master them.

At school, children are trained in reading and writing. But they also should be taught how to read and write images. And if cartoons are the images most familiar to children, then animation should also be a part of their education.

Both art and entertainment, animation gets so little recognition, that it has generally been classified as "just for kids." This has led to an abundant supply of low quality productions.

***Lucien l'Assommeur* (A Friendly Dragon) made by CM1 students.**
© 1996 Atelier de cinema d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie - A.A.A.

However, masterpieces of animation art do exist and it has always been an important part of our workshops at Annecy : showing youngsters films from artists from around the world, using every imaginable technique, and making them aware of contemporary art. Little by little, they become able to appreciate even serious works and even ask to see them again.

In addition to "reading" animation, we also deal with the "writing" part as well. Animation is a wonderful medium for expression and communication, using shape, rhythm, time and movement all working together. Children find it easier to express themselves in terms of movement than with the spoken and written language of adults — a language they have not yet mastered.

Animation can communicate without using words : this is why we could organize international projects among a host of ASIFA workshops, completing films done jointly by groups in 10 to 20 (and more) countries on the same theme, without any language barrier. This is why we invite professional animation artists from around the world to participate as teachers : even when they do not speak French, they are able to communicate their art to the children through drawings, movement, pantomime, et al.

It is very important, in our workshops, that professional animators be involved. The kids should have contact with artists ; they should know that animation is a profession ; that behind the moving images, there is someone who has something to say. It is always a great moment when one of our guests shows and talks about one of his films.

Our main activity are a week long workshops during the school year, involving 24-30 children, ranging in age from 5 to 18. The children take off from school and come with their teachers and interested parents.

Before they come, they have already selected a script they want to make. Their first step, as a group, is doing a storyboard — an important first step in visualizing what they want to say or express. Each kid then selects a segment to animate. The choice of characters is done collectively. Each piece of animation is shot and checked on video line-testing equipment. After the instructor checks the work, it is time for coloring : the colors are also chosen collectively. The film is finally shot either on video or 16mm film. The last day is reserved for recording the sounds made by the kids, who also jointly select the music.

For young kids, the techniques of choice usually include clay, pixilation, cutouts and objects.

Four drawings from *Rêve de Chat* (Cat Jumping) done by CP (Fans) students.
© 1995 Atelier de cinema d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie - A.A.A.

***Préhistoptique* (Prehistoptic), made by 14 – 18 year old students.**
© 1995 Atelier de cinema d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie - A.A.A.

These techniques, which use everyday materials, make animation closer to them.

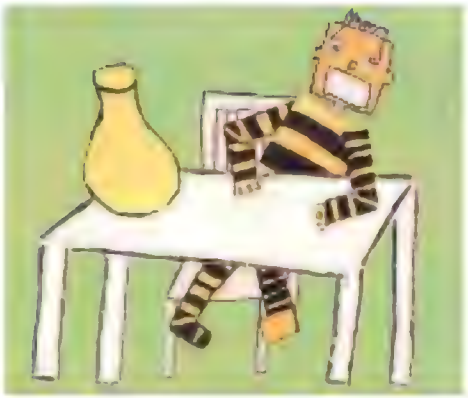
Needless to say, during these one week workshops, both teachers and parents learn a lot about animation.

Every year, we have screenings where all the films are shown. What follows is a series of unforgettable moments, when the students see what they have made — no matter what technique they have used — come to life on the screen. There is just no comparison with their normal homework assignments. And best of all is the applause and appreciation they get from the audience.

During the last school year, we had workshops with 26 classes — about 650 kids in all. We can say that these 650 have been prepared to become a passionate audience for animation — which is our main goal. After all, the art of animation needs a public outside of festivals.

For our 25th anniversary celebration, apart from the usual workshops for children, we are organizing special screenings for both adults and schools alike — with participating professionals.

To date, we have already had tributes to Polish Animation, with Piotr Dumala, who demonstrated his personal techniques of engraving on plaster ; a tribute to Italian Animation with Guido Manuli ; a tribute to French Animation with Bernard Palacios, who presented the works of the Studio La Fabrique. Following these, we will have a tribute to clay animation featuring Peter Lord giving a demonstration of how to make plasticine come alive. And finally, we will have a tribute to Alexandre Alexeïeff and Claire Parker, the creators of the pinscreen — who patronized our workshops when it was founded. This 2 day tribute will include screenings, a seminar featuring 12 guests, including Bretislav Pojar, Jacques Droin, Nag Ansorge, Raoul Servais, Faith Hubley, Juri Norstein and Edward Nazare. Two days that will be dedicated to the art of animation.



***Secoue, Secoue, moi* (Shake, Shake Me), made by three 9 – 13 year old children.**
© 1995 Atelier de cinema d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie - A.A.A.

Nicole Salomon
is Co-Founder of the Annecy Workshop and has been an ASIFA Board Member for several years.

REGISTER with Animation World Network TODAY and

- **Receive our bi-weekly animation News Flash via email**
- **Get announcements of Animation World Network developments**
- **Be a part of the global community of AWN. Interact with animation professionals, scholars and fans all over the world**

Get all this and more FREE, when you register now!

VERSION FRANÇAISE

Déjà 25 ans !

par Nicole Salomon

L'Atelier de cinéma d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie (A.A.A.) — le pionnier des Ateliers ASIFA — célèbre, en 1996, ses 25 ans d'activités.

Quelles motivations ont poussé ses organisateurs à poursuivre, pendant un quart de siècle, leurs efforts pour initier enfants et adolescents à l'Art de l'Animation dans le cadre du temps scolaire ?

Notre époque est celle de l'Image : bandes dessinées, cinéma, publicité, télévision, jeux vidéo... submergent et fascinent la jeunesse. Toutefois, on a très peu fait pour préparer ces jeunes consommateurs d'images à les juger, les apprécier, les sélectionner et les maîtriser.

L'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture traditionnelles se fait à l'école ; il faut aussi y faire l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture des images.

Les images les plus familières aux enfants sont celles des dessins animés — l'Animation doit donc faire partie de leur éducation.

A la fois Art et Divertissement, le Cinéma d'Animation est si méconnu qu'on l'a classé, une fois pour toutes, comme "produit pour enfants", permettant ainsi une abondante production de très basse qualité.

***Lucien l'Assommeur* (Un gentil Dragon) réalisé par une classe de CM1.**
© 1996 Atelier de cinema d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie - A.A.A.

Et cependant, il existe des films d'animation qui sont de purs chefs-d'oeuvre. D'où un volet important des activités de l'Atelier d'Annnecy : faire découvrir aux jeunes des films d'auteurs des quatre coins du monde, en toutes techniques, et leur faire prendre conscience de l'existence de cet Art contemporain. Progressivement, nos jeunes membres deviennent aptes à apprécier même les oeuvres les plus difficiles et même demandent à les revoir.

Parallèlement à ce volet "lecture", nous entreprenons le volet "écriture". L'Animation est un merveilleux moyen d'expression et de communication qui utilise, tout à la fois, forme, rythme, temps et mouvement.

Et les enfants s'expriment avec plus d'aisance par le mouvement visuel que par le langage parlé et écrit des adultes — un langage qu'ils ne maîtrisent pas bien quand ils sont très jeunes.

De plus, l'Animation permet de communiquer sans mots : c'est pourquoi nous avons pu organiser des projets internationaux parmi les Ateliers ASIFA et réaliser des films en collaboration avec des ateliers de 10, 20 pays et plus, ceci sur un même thème sans se heurter aux barrières des langues.

C'est aussi pourquoi nous invitons des animateurs professionels de tous pays à venir encadrer nos semaines d'ateliers : même ceux qui ne connaissent pas notre langue parviennent à transmettre leur art aux jeunes à travers le dessin, le mouvement, les gestes...

Dans notre Atelier, nous pensons qu'il est très important que des animateurs professionels participent à nos activitiés. Il faut que les jeunes aient des contacts avect les artistes ; il faut qu'il sachent que l'Animation est un métier ; que derrière les images qui bougent, il y a quelqu'un qui a quelque chose à exprimer et à communiquer. C'est toujours un grand moment lorsque l'un des réalisateurs que nous invitons à participer à nos activités présente un de ses films aux jeunes, leur montre des documents graphiques et leur parle de son travail.

Nos principales activités sont des ateliers-stages d'une semaine avec des classes : 24 à 30 jeunes de 5 ans à 10 ans (selon la classe). Pendant la semaine d'atelier, les élèves viennent dans nos locaux avec leur enseignant et quelques parents intéressés. Il n'y a aucun cours scolaire cette semaine-là.

Les élèves ont choisi leur sujet et scénario... avant de venir à l'Atelier. La première étape : décider ensemble du storyboard. Une étape importante puisqu'il s'agit de visualiser ce qu'ils veulent raconter ou

Quatres dessins de *Rêve de Chat* (Cat Jumping) réalisés par une classe de CP.
© 1995 Atelier de cinema d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie - A.A.A.

***Préhistoptique* (Prehistoptic), réalisé par des étudiants de 14 – 18 ans.**
© 1995 Atelier de cinema d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie - A.A.A.

exprimer. Chacun choisit un plan du storyboard à animer. Le choix des personnages est collectif, par vote. L'animation de chaque plan est enregistrée et vérifiée sur équipement vidéo pour line-tests. Quand la vérification a été faite par l'animateur enseignant, les jeunes peuvent commencer la mise en couleurs. Les couleurs sont choisies collectivement aussi. Le tournage final est fait par les jeunes sur U'Matic ou 16mm. La dernière journée du stage-atelier est consacrée à la sonorisation : enregistrement de bruitages faits par les jeunes et de musique choisie par eux.

Lorsque nous accueillons des classes d'enfants très jeunes, nous les faisons travailler dans la technique pâte à modeler, ou pixilation ou papier découpé — des techniques qui utilisent des matériaux familiers aux enfants et rendent le cinéma d'animation si proche d'eux.

Pendant chaque semaine de stage-atelier, les enseignants et les parents qui participent apprennent beaucoup sur le cinéma d'animation.

Chaque année, nous organisons de grandes projections de toutes les réalisations nouvelles des jeunes. Moments inoubliables que ceux où ils voient vivre sur le grand écran ce qu'ils ont créé de toutes pièces — quelle qu'en soit la technique. Aucune commune mesure avec le devoir le plus parfait car ils reçoivent l'appréciation et les applaudissements des spectateurs.

Au cours de la dernière année scolaire, nous avons organisé des stages-ateliers avec 26 classes – soit environ 650 jeunes. Nous pouvons dire que nous avons préparé en eux un public passionné de cinéma d'animation – ce qui est notre but principal. L'Art de l'Animation a besoin d'un public en dehors des festivals.

Pour célébrer nos 25 ans d'existence, outre les ateliers de réalisation avec les jeunes, nous organisons des projections — pour adultes et pour les scolaires — avec la participation de professionels.

Nous avons déjà rendu hommage au cinéma d'animation polonais avec la collaboration de Piotr Dumala qui a fait des démonstrations de sa technique personnelle de gravure sur plâtre. Puis hommage au cinéma d'animation italien avec la collaboration de Guido Manuli. Bernard Palacios a présenté le Studio La Fabrique lors de notre hommage au cinéma d'animation français. Prochainement, l'Animation en pâte à modeler sera à l'honneur avec la venue de Peter Lord qui montrera comment il fait vivre ce matériau.

Enfin, nous clôturerons ces hommages par une manifestation en l'honneur d'Alexandre Alexeïeff et Claire Parker, les créateurs de l'Ecran d'épingles et les parrains de notre Atelier à sa fondation. Cette manifestation durera 2 jours avec des projections et une Table Ronde qui rassemblera une douzaine d'invités : parmi eux, Faith Hubley, Bretislav Pojar, Jacques Drouin, Nag Ansorge, Raoul Servais, Juri Norstein, Edward Nazarov...

Deux journées dédiées à l'Art de l'Animation.

***Secoue, Secoue, moi* (Shake, Shake Me), réalisé par des enfants de 9-13 ans.**
© 1995 Atelier de cinema d'Animation d'Annecy et de Haute-Savoie - A.A.A.

Nicole Salomon
est Co-Fondatrice du festival d'Annecy et à été membre de l'ASIFA pendant quelques années.

BOOK REVIEWS

René Laloux.
Ces dessins qui bougent – Cent ans de cinéma d'animation
[Drawings That Move—One Hundred Years of Animated Films].
Paris: Dreamland, 1996. 200 pp. illustrations. 248 F.

© Dreamland éditeur, 1996

By Giannalberto Bendazzi

In his new book, René Laloux states that, "In animated cartoons, contrary to what one may think, the needs of graphics do not necessarily correspond to the needs of movement. Faced with this dichotomy, the artist must find a balance between these two 'enemies,' in order not to prejudice the rights of both: a difficult task easily prone to failure. The easiest way out then, obviously, is to favor one of the two contenders. Consequently, the American School ties drawings to animation; the European School (tied to its cultural heritage) generally tried to do the opposite, basing itself upon graphic imagery. What resulted is very interesting. The total freedom of movement (with its implied association with the Anglo-Saxon taste for nonsense) led Americans to an taste for curved lines, quick movement and comedy, as well as an emphasis on character. In Europe, the emphasis on graphics favored the straight line, slow movement, fantasy and a lesser emphasis on psychology of individual characters."

This is only one of the many pointed, personal and contentious

remarks from a highly contentious, personal and pointed book by René Laloux, recently published in France: ***Ces dessins qui bougent—Cent ans de cinéma d'animation*** (Drawings That Move—One Hundred Years of Animated Films).

Laloux is a youthful 67, endlessly munching on his pipe (I have never seen him smoking), smiling easily and very caustic. He has made some good shorts and three of the most successful animated features ever made in France: ***La planète sauvage*** (Fantastic Planet, 1973), ***Les maitres du temps*** (The Masters of Time, 1981) and ***Gandahar*** (1981)—all of which are sci-fi tales. Now he gives us this book, which provides a rare opportunity to learn first hand what his views and opinions are. Animators have provided some of our century's richest and most charming cinematic moments, but they have seldom written their opinions down. So, although we have their films, we are often left wanting as to what their views are (or were).

Ces dessins qui bougent begins and ends like a conventional "history of animation": it starts with a chronological rundown of films and filmmakers, and ends with a long year-by-year filmography. The rest, though, is a wonderfully creative and disorderly discourse, impelled by a pure need to communicate. You feel like you are reading a transcript of one of those endless arguments that festival-goers get into, when the theater lights are off, but the passion is still hot.

Not by chance, Laloux explicitly includes his memoirs of the glorious Annecy Festival, in France, especially the early editions, when "we were a bunch of young filmmakers with films in competition, like [France's] Jacques Colombat and [Italy's] Pino Zac, to mention only two of those friends, and we denounced with vengeance each and every film which had even the slightest resemblance to animated cartoons or with entertainment aimed at children. We could accept laughter only if it was black comedy or based on 'stupid and evil' ideas (i.e., films by Japan's Yoji Kuri), or anticlerical (i.e., films by Italy's Pino Zac)."

René Laloux © Dreamland éditeur, 1996

What emerges from all this is an intimate self-portrait of Laloux himself. It is shaped by the things he loves, hates or decides to ignore; by the things he sees in himself, or things that are alien to him; anti-Disney idiosyncrasies ("The studio's recent films show an even more pronounced graphic weakness") and an impassioned defense of scriptwriting ("It is difficult to be a real auteur, as very few filmmakers are really able to write an original and well-constructed script, direct actors, edit the film with a good rhythm, compose the right music ... The low quality of many films should be blamed first of all on weak scripts and dialogue.") There are even paradoxes and provocations ("Will we be forced to rediscover silence, so we can really express ourselves again in this audiovisual world dominated by noise and void of words?"). And there is, of course (as Laloux being a visual artist who began his career as a painter), a very good selection of illustrations.

Ces dessins qui bougent will probably perplex young readers, or those who are not very knowledgeable about animation. It is far from being objective, accurate or scholarly. It even has its share of misspellings (for instance, Matt Kroening instead of Matt Groening). But it will certainly stimulate the reflections of all those who are still among the happy few. And his ultimate message is very optimistic and simple: animation, he notes, "is an art that you conjugate to the future time."

Giannalberto Bendazzi *is a Milan-based film historian and critic whose own history of animation,* Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation, *was published in the US by Indiana University Press and in the UK by John Libbey. His other books on animation include* Topoline e poi *(1978),* Due voite l'oceana *(1983) and* Il movimento creato *(1993, with Guido Michelone).*

DESERT ISLAND SERIES

1996 Academy Award Nominees for Animated Short Subject

compiled by Frankie Kowalski

Welcome to our Desert Island; our first in a series and a unique part of our magazine. My monthly quest is to find out how animation (and other arts) impacts and influences internationally renown animators, actors, directors, producers, musicians, and so on. You get the drift. ***Animation World Magazine*** asked of them the following question; "If standed on a desert island, what 10 films would you want to have with you?"

Since we were scheduled to go on-line right after Oscar Mania time, we thought it would be fitting to ask all the Animated Short Subject nominees. These are their responses along with something a little extra — their reaction to getting nominated. Regrettably, Nick Park, who won the Oscar for ***A Close Shave*** could not be reached for comment. We at Animation World Magazine wish to congratulate all of the nominees!

And the winner is...Nick Park... for *A Close Shave*
© Aardman Animations

John Dilworth, director of *The Chicken from Outer Space*:

"When I completed *The Chicken From Outer Space* I sat alone with the film and thought I was done. I was satisfied. I had been making films since 1985 and finally believed I understood how to make a short animated film. I did not want to make another one. I wanted to go on to the next big thing, whether that was the Internet or features. Then out of nowhere the film began taking over my life and got itself nominated for an Academy Award for Best Animated Short Subject. It screwed up all my plans."

Top 10 cartoons if stranded on a desert island...

1. *Red Hot Riding Hood*, Tex Avery
2. *King-Size Canary*, Tex Avery
3. *Bad Luck Blackie*, Tex Avery
4. *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery*, Bob Clampett
5. *Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarfs*, Bob Clampett
6. *Little Rural Riding Hood*, Tex Avery
7. *The Dover Boys*, Chuck Jones
8. *Corny Concerto*, Bob Clampett
9. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, Chuck Jones
10. *Stimpy's Big Day*, John K.

Chris Bailey, director of *Runaway Brain*:

"I think my excitement built slowly over the morning of the nomination. My brother Jeff called and woke me up with news that *Runaway Brain* had been nominated and I really didn't know how to react. I think I managed to say that's great news, thanks for calling and hung up. My wife Denise, asked who had called so early in the morning and when I gave her the news, she flipped! Everyone around me was excited, but I was kinda numb.

I stayed that way for much of the morning, but after a couple of hours of congratulatory phone calls from friends, the numbness wore off and I was able to enjoy the honor like a normal human."

Top 10 cartoons if stranded on a desert island...

1. *Drip-Along Daffy*
2. *The Beedeviled Bruin*
3. *From A to Zzzzz*
4. *What Opera Doc*, by Chuck Jones
5. *Duck Amuck*, by Chuck Jones
6. *Stimpy's Invention*, by John K.
7. *Stimpy's Cartoon Show*, by John K.
8. *Bad Luck Blackie*
9. *Wild and Woolfy*
10. *The Wrong Trousers*, by Nick Park

Chris Landreth and Robin Bargar, directors of *The End*:

"I was totally taken by surprise. ***The End*** is a pretty experimental and unconventional piece, both in its imagery and in its narrative structure. It is cool that the Academy is open to weird stuff like this. Yowz!"

Top 10 picks if stranded on a desert island...

1. Most of the books by Robert Anton Wilson
2. The entire compilation of the graphic novel ***Watchman*** by Alan Moore and David Gibbons
3. ***The Illusion of Life*** by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston
4. All animation from Pixar
5. Any book with the works of John Hartfield
6. ***Gertie the Dinosaur*** and ***The Sinking of the Lusitania*** by Winsor McKay
7. All animation by Fréderic Back (***The Mighty River, The Man Who Planted Trees***)
8. The book ***The Chalice and the Blade*** by Riane Eisler
9. ***Pinocchio*** , by Walt Disney
10. EVERYTHING that Robert Crumb has ever touched.

The stars of *A Close Shave*, Wallace and Gromit.
© 1995 Aardman Animations

Robin Bargar:

"It's hard to be radical when the establishment nominates you for something. So we invent psuedo-radical and take the credit and publiciity with a wink and no apologies. Case in point."

Top 5 picks if stranded on a desert island...

1. ***Fantastic Planet***, by René Laloux
2. ***Ballet Mechanique***, a film by Ferdinand Leger
3. ***What's Opera Doc*** by Chuck Jones
4. ***Edward Muybridge, Xoopractographer***, a film by Thom Anderson
5. ***Unreachable Homeless***, a film by Klaus Wyborny

Alexei Kharitidi, director of *Gagarin* :

"When I heard about it, I couldn't believe it. Then I talked with my producer and was still very surprised. It is difficult to express my emotions because this film is close to my heart."

Top 6 picks if stranded on a desert island...

1. ***Sati-Mania*** by Gasparovich
2. ***The Tale of Tales*** by Norstein
3. ***The Jungle Book***, by Walt Disney
4. Feature films by Roman Polanski (***Chinatown***)
5. Feature films by Francis Ford Coppala (***The Godfather I, II, II***)
6. Russian Literature by Chekov, Nabokov, Tolstoy and Bunin

Drawn during Alexei Kharitidi's quick visit to the AWN offices.

And the envelope please...

by John R. Dilworth

I was strapped tight in the 20 ton silver rocket ship named To Infinity And Beyond with countdown within minutes. I reminded myself to "breathe" according to basic manual training. "Body Functions" read high normal. Don't want to get too high, it distorts the mind's reaction time and I'll probably go in my suit.

So much prep goes into sending "off planet" pioneers into new places. The training period alone takes years. Some trainees never get assigned a flight. Some just get lucky. Like me. But, I love to travel "off planet." What else would I do?

Two minutes to "Take Off." No matter how hard I concentrate I begin to release water from every pore. I could feel the ship contracting with compressed energy like a Cobra ready to strike. There's noise coming from all directions. It becomes muddled. Ground Control is speaking to me over the transmitter. I cannot understand a word they're saying. It could be a laundry list.

Through a submarine telescope. Thirty seconds. I begin to want out. Somebody get me out of this thing. How did I get into this in the first place. Ha ha. I laugh from how ridiculous I feel. Who am I kidding? Mighty Mouse couldn't drag me out of here.

Who am I kidding? Mighty Mouse couldn't drag me out of here.

I have thoughts of every timid event I ever experienced. I cannot remember the actual events only the feeling of embarrassment and helplessness. And the wish for it to end. Twenty seconds. My heart beat accelerates. It forces the blood to expand the veins in my temples. More noise from Control. "Stay cool, starting countdown..." Ten seconds. This is a reality. All I want to do is curse. Every obscene word in the world gushes out of my mouth like flushing a clogged toilet

Five seconds. I'm going to blast off. Four seconds. Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Three seconds. I do not recognize my physical self. Two. Suddenly the worst possible event occurs.

ABORT! ABORT! ABORT! ABORT! The flight is terminated. The rocket shuts down. An incredible release of energy escapes from my body and from the ship. I am completely wet.

Every "off planet" pioneer knows there is an 80 percent chance your flight will be terminated at the very last second. And for whatever the reason you accept that as part of the training. I exit the rocket and wipe down. I need to eat. Food becomes instant gratification. I am exhausted. Hollow in fact. I was looking towards the stars and imagined the force of ascent pressing against my face, till I looked like The Joker.

The next scheduled flight is undetermined.

Comic strip by John R. Dilworth exclusively for *Animation World Magazine*

© John H. Dilworth

NEWS

Chromacolour Digital Palette To Be Used By USAnimation

Hollywood-based USAnimation, Inc., a leading supplier of digital ink-and-paint software, has now made available the popular Chromacolour palette on its systems. Chromacolour International, based in London, is the world's largest supplier of traditional animation supplies, including paints. It had been expected that Microsoft Softimage would be first to gain use of the Chromacolour palette for its Toonz software, but apparently negotiations stalled and USAnimation was able to take advantage of the situation.

Manga Entertainment Announces Launch of U.S. Theatrical Division With Release of Cybertech Thriller Ghost In the Shell

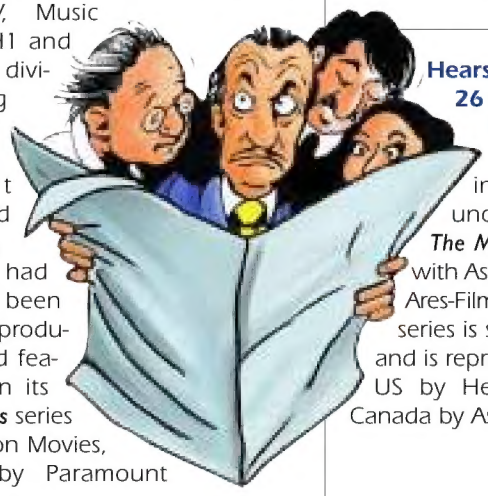
The film, from the producers of ***Akira***, is based on the cyberpunk manga (comic books) by Masamune Shiro (***Appleseed*** and ***Dominion***), directed by Mamoru Oshii (***Patlabor***). It was co-produced by Kodansha, Bandai Visual and Manga, Inc. ***Ghost in the Shell*** explores one of the perennial themes of science fiction, i.e., the potential implications of artificial intelligence. No release date has yet been set.

Brøderbund's Logical Journey Of The Zoombinis

—The big bad Bloats have taken over the Zoombinis' island home! Rescue them from impending disaster and lead them on an adventurous journey to a new homeland. At least so goes the pitch for ***Logical Journey of the Zoombinis***, Brøderbund's newest CD-ROM adventure for children ages 8–12, which is designed to develop critical math skills. Part of Brøderbund's Active Mind Series, ***Logical Journey of Zoombinis*** is available at retail outlets for about $40.

Nickelodeon, MTV Networks and Viacom Forms Alliance With Klasky Csupo

MTV Networks, a division of Viacom, Inc., and parent of Nickelodeon, has formed a strategic alliance for television and feature film development and production with Klasky Csupo, Inc., the Hollywood-based studio known for such shows as ***Rugrats*** and ***Aaahh!!! Real Monsters***. The multiyear deal expands the company's affiliation with Nickelodeon to include MTV, Music Television, VH1 and other Viacom divisions, including Paramount Television, Paramount Pictures and Showtime. Klasky Csupo had previously been scheduled to produce a animated feature based on its popular ***Rugrats*** series for Nickelodeon Movies, for release by Paramount Pictures.



Macross Plus Volume 4 to be Released April 16, 1996 by Manga Entertainment

Directed by Shoji Kawamori, the final chapter of ***Macross Plus***, which claims to be the most expensive piece of video animation to come out of Japan, combines both traditional and computer animation. The first two volumes of ***Macross Plus*** were recently nominated by ASIFA-Hollywood for Annie Awards for Outstanding Achievement in an Animated Home Video Production.

Hearst Entertainment Producing 26 Episode Series Based on The Hunchback of Notre Dame

Hearst Entertainment, based in Santa Monica, has announced that it will be producing ***The Magical Adventures of Quasimodo*** with Astral Programming Enterprises, Ares-Films and France 3. The animated series is scheduled for delivery this fall and is represented for distribution in the US by Hearst Entertainment and in Canada by Astral Distribution.

Stormfront Studios Announces Tony La Russa Baseball 3: 1996 Edition

This update to the award-winning CD-ROM simulation game is said to feature an improved interface, along with the latest rosters and stats. It will In addition, Tony La Russa Baseball 3:1996 Edition will be the first PC will be available at all major retail software outlets at a suggested retail price of $39.95.

Klasky Csupo Commercials names Barbey/ Lassoff as exclusive New York Reps

The commercial production arm of Klasky Csupo has signed Geoff Barbey and Eric Lassoff as exclusive East Coast representatives. Their task will be to build upon the foundation the year-old division has built in the New York market. According to Barbey, whose company also represents live-action spot director Ron Travisano, "Klasky Csupo Commercials stands out in a very crowded field. They hold to a tight standard when it comes to quality and concept, something that is immediately apparent when you see their reel. No one can argue with the quality of their work, and we intend to target every creative shop on the East Coast, large or small."

Disney Closes Colossal Development Deal

Colossal Pictures and Walt Disney Television Animation have entered into a multiyear development and production pact. San Francisco-based Colossal, known for such shows as ***Liquid Television*** and ***Aeon Flux***, will be exclusive to Disney for the creation and production of original televisions shows. The agreement covers a wide range of projects, both animated and live action, including television movies, series, mixed media, special effects and direct-to-video. Colossal President Drew Takahashi said, "We're extremely excited about working with the Disney family. Our companies share a passion for animation, both for its tradition and its unlimited potential."

The British Short Film Festival

Following the huge success of the last festival, which had over 3,000 entries, The 1996 British Short Film Festival will take place September 19–26 at UCI Plaza 2, off Piccadilly Circus, right in the heart of London's West End. In addition to such regular programs as "The Best of British: Atlantic Crossing" and "British and International Short Films," the festival will include a "Retrospective of Work from Australia," "Black and Asian Films From New York" and the latest "Experimental Work from France." For further details on the program and submission forms, please contact Sophie in the festival office at: 0181.743.8000 ext. 62222/62052.

First International Children Animation Festival to be held in Russia

—The festival will take place in Nizhny Novgorod (a city 400 kilometers east of Moscow) from September 22–29, 1996. Supported by the Russian Cinematographists' Association, the Russian Animators' Association and the Russian Producers' Association, the festival is taking place during a special celebration for the 100th anniversary of Russian Cinema and the All-Russia Industrial Fair.

Animation World Magazine 1996 - 1997 Calendar

The May issue of
Animation World Magazine
will put the spotlight on
Women In Animation.

The issue will features articles by and about women,
including pioneer experimental animators
Claire Parker and Mary Ellen Butte,
interviews with Stephanie Graziano,
head of production for DreamWorks Television Animation,
and Britain's irreverent Candy Guard.
The work of UNICEF's groundbreaking
Meena and Sara projects will be highlighted,
along with that of Women in Animation.

The Independent Spirit	(June)
The Spirit of the Olympics	(July)
Anime, Anime, Anime—A Worldwide Phenomenon	(August)
International Television	(September)
Politics & Propaganda	(October)
Theme Park Animation	(November)
Interactive Animation	(December)
Animation Festivals	(January '97)
International Animation Industry	(February '97)
Children & Animation	(March '97)